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A U S T R A L I A

**Preventive Diplomacy: The Role of the
Individual in Attempts to Prevent War**

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Abstract

This dissertation studies individuals' attempts to prevent war. It introduces the concept of human agency to the literature on preventive diplomacy, asking how individuals have attempted to prevent war historically, and to which extent their actions can account for the outbreak, or absence, of war. The following work consists of three parts: philosophy, history and practical theory. In the first part, this dissertation argues that preventive diplomacy can best be studied at the individual level of analysis, because individuals are arguably the most important causes of war. The empirical part of this thesis traces six case studies of individuals attempting to prevent war. The final part of this dissertation proposes the tentative foundations of a *practical theory* of preventive diplomacy. This dissertation contributes to knowledge by providing an agent-centric account of war, which looks to individuals as its ultimate cause, and the only hope for its prevention. It also features primary source research, including interviews with policy-makers, which cast light on forgotten efforts to prevent war. The case studies on Taiwan, Kenya and Georgia draw on new or under-studied material.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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Publications during candidature

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I can now reveal that, as well as concerning myself with the topic which follows, I have spent over three years studying my social support network – my friends, family members and colleagues. I am happy to say that they have passed this exam with flying colours.

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It is a tired cliché to say that I couldn't have done it without my family, but it is also remarkably true; not in the sense that I would have been incapable, but that I would have lacked the motivating fire to study efforts to prevent war. My interest in this topic comes directly from my family members' lived experiences. My grandparents lived and fought in the Second World War. My parents lived and fought in New Caledonia's civil war. Had this conflict escalated, my father – who was nearly fatally wounded in 1988 – would have almost certainly lost his life. And I, mine.

I therefore approach the study of war and its prevention as, I think, many others who come to it do as well: motivated by a deep emotional understanding of the costs of violent conflict, and an intellectual flame in search of answers or, at least, understanding. Importantly, I think the emotional urge to prevent war ought not to obstruct a hard-nosed understanding of the limitations of attempts to prevent war. Cynicism and idealism are best left behind. Will power must be our flame; judgment our guide.

During my candidature, I began to apply my academic knowledge in the field, undertaking internships at NATO and the UN, and founding New Caledonia's first conflict prevention NGO in 2013. I owe my team of seven volunteers a huge debt of thanks for following me on this adventure. This not-for-profit work is gruelling and merciless. But I remain motivated by my conclusions, in the dissertation which follows, that the future occurrence of war is not etched in stone, but depends solely upon the wills of individuals.

Keywords

preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention, agency, free will, contingency, war

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Introduction

“Though I have been trained as a soldier, and participated in many battles, there never was a time when, in my opinion, some way could not be found to prevent the drawing of the sword.”

– Ulysses Grant

A British tank commander was at the vanguard of NATO forces in Pristina, Kosovo. He was tasked with securing a strategic airport. Upon arriving at the airport, he was greeted by two hundred Russian soldiers with their weapons aiming at his unit. When peace parleys collapsed, a general ordered him to “destroy” the enemy.¹ The Cold War had ended ten years earlier, but NATO and Russia were on the brink of their first military clash. Captain Blunt refused the order to attack. Shortly thereafter, a British general joined Blunt in his refusal: “I’m not going to have my soldiers start World War Three!” He proposed encircling the airfield instead. This strategy paid off when the isolated Russian soldiers began running out of food and water. The Pristina incident of June 1999 was resolved peacefully by an insubordinate soldier named James Blunt.²

That a lone soldier (and soon-to-be singer-songwriter) helped to prevent a great power war says as much about the causes of war as it does about its prevention. Throughout history, the peace of the world has hinged upon such minuscule actions. A well-placed bullet has sparked wars; a well-timed message has prevented others. Experience tells us that war and peace hinge upon the actions of human agents like James Blunt. But forests of academic papers tell us that war and peace hinge upon much broader, impersonal forces which have little to do with individuals like James Blunt at all. International structures, states, institutions, alliances, culture and social norms are the most common units of analysis in International Relations (IR) scholarship.

One prevalent IR theory, balance-of-power realism, assumes that individuals are practically powerless to control the outbreak of war.³ “Wars are normal,” some scholars claim, and are beyond the direct control of human beings.⁴ Some go so far as to claim that structural forces pre-determine the outbreak of war.⁵ In this worldview, the actions of individuals are almost completely crushed by the weight and power of the impersonal forces of history. Some historical actors have ratified this view. Sir Edward Grey, for example, insisted that his failure to mediate the July 1914 crisis was due not to his actions, but rather to “the deliberate, relentless strokes of Fate, determined on human misfortune, as they are represented in Greek tragedy.”⁶ Scholars and former leaders often espouse a view, usually in hindsight, which makes war appear inevitable or beyond the power of human

¹ BBC (2010a).

² Peck (2010).

³ Mearsheimer (1990: 12, 22-23).

⁴ Waltz (1988: 620-621).

⁵ Friedman (2009: 49).

⁶ Grey (1935:174).

agents to prevent. Fate or some other concept, it would seem, *imposes* war upon unwilling and powerless human agents, who meekly carry it out.

There is something missing in this picture. It fails to account for the agency of those wingless bipeds that give the order, fight and die in wars.⁷ Individuals are often the forgotten actors in international politics.⁸ As Renshon notes, the “importance of individuals...is contrary to many mainstream theories of international relations,” even though “individuals do, in many circumstances, exercise vast influence over the course of events.”⁹ Comparing the Balkan crises of 1914 and 1999, human agency might explain why one ended violently and the other peacefully.¹⁰ This view assumes that *human beings*, acting individually or collectively, are the ultimate source of most change in international politics.¹¹ In this view, humans no longer appear to be the passive vessels of impersonal forces, but the masters of their fates.¹² Or, to put it another way, the James Blunts of this world may not be the puppets, but the primary *causes* of war and peace.

In this dissertation, I argue that the latter is a more compelling conclusion. This thesis draws on the philosophy of agency, free will and contingency, six empirical case studies, and inductive logic to argue that humans – rather than forces beyond their control – cause wars and prevent them. This would seem like a platitude, were it not so consistently overlooked or downplayed in the academic literature on International Relations and, in particular, preventive diplomacy.¹³

One scholar described the field of preventive diplomacy as a “scattered literature”.¹⁴ Emma Stewart concurs that it is “a notoriously fuzzy concept.”¹⁵ Scholars specialising in conflict prevention and its sub-field of preventive diplomacy appear to agree on only one point: that there is no generally accepted definition of these concepts.¹⁶ Definitional confusion has often hindered substantive discussions on the originality and utility of this concept.¹⁷ According to a well-established distinction, preventive diplomacy is a short-term, operational response to an international crisis.¹⁸ It is distinct from long-term, structural prevention. The United Nations defines preventive diplomacy as “diplomatic action to prevent or mitigate the spread of armed conflict.”¹⁹

⁷ Socrates famously defined humans as “wingless bipeds”.

⁸ Hudson and Vore (1995: 210).

⁹ Renshon (2006: 15).

¹⁰ Breuning (2007: 14).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Churchill (1941).

¹³ CHAPTER 1 will explore the contributions of IR theorists to the literature on the causes of war, including that of Kenneth Waltz, which does consider an individual level of analysis, but largely dismisses it.

¹⁴ Lund (2009: 305).

¹⁵ Stewart (2003: 2).

¹⁶ See McHugh (1995: 15-17), Wallensteen (1998: 33-35), Ackermann, (2000: 18); Aggestam, (2003: 12-13).

¹⁷ Aggestam, (2003: 13) and Stewart (2003: 3, 15).

¹⁸ The basic conceptual division is between *operational* and *structural* prevention. The former consists of short-term actions to prevent imminent violent conflict. The latter consists of long-term strategies aimed at addressing the underlying causes of conflicts. See Carnegie Commission (1997: 40, 48).

¹⁹ As defined by United Nations (2011: 1).

This definition is narrow enough to be useful.²⁰ It contains two elements: 1) attempting to prevent a dispute or crisis from escalating to war, and 2) mitigating the spread of armed conflict once it has arisen. Therefore, although an attempt to prevent war may fail, attempts to prevent it from escalating may still be referred to as preventive diplomacy. At the same time, preventive diplomacy does not seek “to resolve all outstanding issues of disputes but rather to control and remove all imminent causes to violent escalation both within and between states.”²¹ As Zartman stresses, “it is the violent expression of conflict that is most properly the focus of preventive diplomacy.”²² Preventive diplomacy does not aim to prevent all forms of socio-political conflict, only its violent expression.

James Blunt’s actions in Pristina help us to articulate a problem in the academic literature on the causes of war and the possibility of preventing it: the seemingly irresolvable tension between structural and agent-level theories. This forms a central element of the present study on preventive diplomacy; only with a sound understanding of the causes of war can we reasonably contemplate its prevention. I will return, in the next chapter, to a deeper theoretical discussion of the causes of war. For now, we are equipped to articulate the research problem and questions of this research project.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

This dissertation focusses on *the role of agency in preventive diplomacy*. Agency can be understood as the idea that, as human beings, “the conscious exercise of our capacities makes us the source of what happens in society.” To possess agency is to exercise “a causal impact on our social world.”²³ Agency can be observed at the individual level of analysis – by focussing on people. This *idiographic* approach to the social science presumes a large degree of human agency, in contrast to *nomothetic* attempts to discern law-like regularities in human affairs.²⁴ However, this is more than a methodological problem of choosing one’s preferred level of analysis to study war and peace. One’s methodological choice has potent philosophical implications. This is a profoundly *metaphysical* problem, which leads directly to questions of free will and determinism.²⁵

Thinkers from Antiquity to modernity have attributed the outbreak war to forces beyond human control, such as gods, the laws of history, or the structure of international politics. Montesquieu, for example, argued that if a particular battle resulted ruined a State, “a general cause was always

²⁰ See United Nations (1992), Wallenstein (1998: 33-34), Weiss (2006: 73), Lund (1996: 37), Ramcharan, (2008: 8) and Zartman (2001: 3).

²¹ Aggestam, (2003: 14).

²² Zartman (2001: 3).

²³ Elder-Vass (2010: 87).

²⁴ Tetlock and Belkin (1996: 10).

²⁵ Singer (1961: 85), Carlsnaes (1993: 245-270).

responsible for the fact that this State had to be ruined by a single battle.”²⁶ That is, the general cause – whatever it may be – was *always* going to ruin that state. In this conception, the choices of the sovereign, the general, and even tactical commanders on the battlefield are of little importance. That State’s loss of the battle, and its consequent collapse, were determined by a general or structural cause which social scientists may presumably uncover. Hence, focussing on a higher level of analysis implies that the actions of individual humans may be determined by larger structural forces, which we may simply be unable to conceive, let alone understand.²⁷

This research problem grows out of the tension between two levels of analysis: the structural and the individual. Let us return to our previous example to articulate the problem. If we zoom *out* of Pristina to a higher level of analysis, NATO and Russia appear to be agents in their own right, posturing and interacting within structural constraints (such as the balance of power). But if we zoom *in* to the airport scene, as in the above example, the agency of NATO and Russia dissolves. Instead, we see human beings posturing, interacting and negotiating.

The basic research problem is that each level of analysis reveals a potential ‘agent’ having a causal impact on the social world. Both NATO and James Blunt are plausible agents. But there is no firm basis upon which to decide which of the two ought to have analytical primacy, or which agent is the more *causally efficacious*.

There are only three possible ways out of this dilemma. The first is to imbue concepts such as ‘NATO’ or ‘the international system’ with causal efficacy, and to downplay James Blunt’s agency, therefore giving the structural level primacy. This implies, perplexingly, that human agents have little or no causal power over war and peace. This is not a straw man; it is a strongly-defended view in International Relations, philosophy and sociology.²⁸ The second solution is to empower James Blunt with causal efficacy, and to deny NATO’s agency. This gives primacy to the causal power of humans over that of higher-level structural forces. The third solution is to attempt to reconcile NATO’s agency with that of James Blunt, that is, to share the causal power between a structural concept (NATO) and a human being (Blunt).

I seek to tackle this philosophical problem, in the belief that it has practical implications. Although this research problem delves into some deep recesses of metaphysics, it does so based on the belief that these are not idle questions of purely esoteric interest. Although I dive deep into these questions, I have attempted to remain tethered to practical experience.²⁹

The above problem has at least two real-life implications for diplomatic practitioners. Firstly, how scholars and practitioners conceive of the causes of war frames policies to prevent it. If we

²⁶ Cited in Ned Lebow (2010: 257).

²⁷ Elder-Vass (2010: 180-181).

²⁸ See CHAPTER 1.

²⁹ I owe the metaphor of research as exploring a dark cave, with a weak light on one’s head, to Nicholas Taylor, a colleague and friend.

believe that over-population is the root cause of all wars, then we are liable to recommend that governments forcibly limit births to prevent it.³⁰ If we understand war as resulting from a vitamin deficiency, we might recommend vitamin pills to prevent it.³¹ If we understand wars as resulting from deep structural causes such as poverty, we are likely to endorse broad policies to prevent it, including “prudential crop and forest management, targeted development aid, and reformed structures of governance.”³² This research project, though at times highly abstract, has a clearly practical goal: to understand the role of agents in causing war, with a view to understanding how they might prevent it.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to lay the foundations of a *practical theory* of preventive diplomacy. To paraphrase the theorist of war, Carl von Clausewitz, such a theory aims to guide those who wish to learn about how war has been prevented in the past, and to help them to avoid pitfalls in attempting to prevent it in the future.³³ I do not presume to propose a coherent and final theory of preventive diplomacy. Achieving that objective may take decades or more of collaborative research and exchanges between theorists and practitioners. Instead, I aim to make the more targeted contribution of theorising on agency, and arguing that it belongs at the core of preventive diplomacy.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This introduction began with the intuition that structural explanations of war may ignore the role of individuals in causing it and, thus, in potentially preventing it. The James Blunt anecdote revealed a fundamental dilemma about how we discuss agency in International Relations. Either the broader concepts which scholars routinely discuss – including states, structures and alliances – cause wars, in which case individuals have little power to prevent it, or vice versa. Or individual agents determine war and peace. Alternatively, agents and structural forces may causally co-determine war, in a generally unexplained and taken-for-granted interaction. I seek to resolve this dilemma by answering a two-part question:

How have individual agents attempted to prevent war historically, and to what extent did individuals causally determine the outbreak, or prevention, of war?

In the first part, I ask the *empirical* question of how actual people have historically attempted to prevent war. The second part asks the *philosophical* question of which role individuals played in

³⁰ Devaldes (1925).

³¹ Garnett (2013: 37).

³² Bloomfield and Moulton (1997: 58-59).

³³ Clausewitz (1982: 34).

determining the outcome of a crisis. Following Diagram 1.1, these two parts are designed to intersect to produce insights into the practice of preventive diplomacy.

This relatively abstract problem is important to both scholars and practitioners, since it might have life-or-death implications for vulnerable people in potential war zones. The stakes are high, because this debate informs policy-makers designing solutions to prevent armed violence. The study of International Relations is notoriously disconnected from policy-making.³⁴ However, debates on conflict prevention and the causes of war appear to influence practitioners' thinking, albeit in a confused manner.³⁵

In the next chapter, I argue that IR theorists should give similar consideration to human agency among the causes of war. For now, I will justify my statement that agency is downplayed in the literature on preventive diplomacy by reviewing the major metaphors of war which permeate it.

THREE METAPHORS OF WAR

When pondering the causes of war, and how it might be prevented, scholars have long resorted to metaphorical language. I now explore three popular metaphors for war: war as a disease, an engineering problem or a duel. I argue that the first two are deeply misleading. Instead, I will argue that the notion of war as a duel is the most appropriate. I conclude that metaphors have often clouded discussions on the causes of war,³⁶ and occulted the role of individuals in causing it.

Metaphors have a profound impact on how we understand the world. A metaphor, like a solar eclipse, "hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its most salient and interesting characteristics when viewed through the right telescope."³⁷ Metaphors may serve to simplify reality, to justify a course of action, and to imply a policy as self-evident. They tend to dull critical thinking.³⁸ This is particularly obvious in foreign policy. As Fred Iklé argues, "metaphors always pose dangerous traps for the policy analyst."³⁹ Seeing communism as an infectious disease, for example, naturally led to aggressive policies to contain and eradicate it.⁴⁰ In 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama used a similar metaphor in committing the U.S. air force to "eradicate" the

³⁴ See, for example, Walt (2005: 23-48).

³⁵ I personally witnessed, at two diplomatic conferences (in Manila in October 2014, and Suva in May 2015), numerous NGO, IGO and diplomatic representatives employing the buzzwords of the field, and reflecting some knowledge of the literature on the causes of war. Unfortunately, however, the question of causality seemed to be the most confused, with no two officials appearing to agree on its causes, most simply pointing to the 'deep' causes of war (such as under-development and inequality), and only two delegates isolating human psychology and agency as primary causes of war.

³⁶ One participant at the aforementioned diplomatic conference, for example, did not ask what *caused* a specific war, but "which metaphor can we come up with to explain it?"

³⁷ A. Paivio, cited in Mio (1997: 113).

³⁸ Mio (1997: 119).

³⁹ Cited in Shimko (1994: 656).

⁴⁰ Shimko (1994: 663).

“cancer” of the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS).⁴¹ To the extent that they may frame certain policies as natural, metaphors may truly have life-and-death consequences.

One of the most enduring metaphors is of war as a disease. In his 1623 scheme to prevent war, *The New Cineas*, Éméric Crucé adopted this metaphor.⁴² Crucé did not propose a scheme for peace which involved “eradicate[ing] the Turks in four years or thereabouts”, as was popular in his day.⁴³ Instead, he conceptualised humanity as “one body”, so that the disease of one member would always spread to others.⁴⁴ Instead of killing Turks, Crucé proposed killing bacteria-like intruders in this body: mainly warriors, but also savages, thieves and brigands.⁴⁵ Kings should “cleanse the sea” of pirates, too, for good measure.⁴⁶ This metaphor has endured to the present day.

One of the earliest books in the literature adopted this extended metaphor. Preventive diplomacy could be understood as preventive medicine, it argued.⁴⁷ The root cause of war, in Cahill’s diagnosis, was “incubating prejudices and injustices that inevitably breed hatred and conflict.”⁴⁸ Another clinician argued that conflict was “cancerous” to the body politic.⁴⁹ Politicians deal with social illnesses, just as doctors deal with physiological illnesses.⁵⁰ To prevent them from becoming virulent, politicians ought to tackle “not the circumstantial causes, but the deep-seated ones.”⁵¹ Kofi Annan advised that peacekeeping was “like a form of chemotherapy” which might “prevent metastasis” and “bring the disease into remission.”⁵² This metaphoric language has unsettling practical implications.

Firstly, this metaphor reduces war to “a primitive and repugnant anachronism,”⁵³ like Polio or the Spanish Flu, caused by “evil forces”.⁵⁴ This not only over-simplifies, but conflates all wars as *War*, a singular, universal, monolithic Thing. But wars are vastly different, context-dependent phenomena. The analogy of war as a disease implies that War might have one rationally discoverable antidote. In looking for a universal solution to War, we may resemble the hawker who, following the Lisbon earthquake in 1775, sold anti-earthquake pills to survivors.⁵⁵

Secondly, understanding war as an evil in itself does not do justice to human experience. This metaphor erases, for example, any distinction between wars of conquest and wars of national

⁴¹ Miller (2014).

⁴² Woolsey (1910: 590).

⁴³ Crucé (1623 : 6).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 37.

⁴⁷ Cahill (2000).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Owen (2000: 3).

⁵⁰ Hume (2000: 20).

⁵¹ Bedjaoui (2000: 35).

⁵² Annan (2000: 173, 181).

⁵³ Eliasson (2000: 239).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* xvi.

⁵⁵ Carr (1962: 8).

survival. It tells both conqueror and conquered that the *activity* of war itself – not the intentions of the participants – is an evil and primitive act. Both the Finnish war of self-defence and the Soviet war of aggression are equally condemned. In other words, this metaphor hides the fact that certain wars may, at times, be just.⁵⁶

Finally, the analogy of war-as-disease divorces the activity from the belligerents. War appears as a Thing apart from the wills, intentions and actions of Soviets and Finns. The most disconcerting omission in this picture is that the agents in question – the belligerents – are invisible. The issue is precisely that certain actors, at certain times, *do* want to fight, for a range of reasons. Thus, the medical metaphor fails to accurately represent the world, because individual people are unlike pathogens, germs and diseases.

I now turn to an equally influential metaphor: war as a mechanical failure. According to this metaphor, the tentative preventer of war is no longer a medical doctor, but an engineer. As one 20th Century writer put it, the forces conspiring towards war resemble

a condition of molecular tension in the minds of the Nations...which may at any moment bring about an explosion which they will be *powerless to control*. The case is identical with that of an ordinary steam boiler, delivering so and so many pounds of steam to its engines as long as the envelope can contain the pressure but let a breach in its continuity arise – relieving the boiling water of all restraint – and in a moment the whole mass flashes into vapour, developing *a power no work of man can oppose*.⁵⁷

War, in this view, is a natural – perhaps uncontrollable – force. In a 1944 pamphlet by the U.S. War Department, war is explained in such mechanical terms. Like the engineers who “looked for the bugs in the models” of planes until they could design one which actually flew, all that was needed was to study errors in previous models.⁵⁸ The most popular model of preventive diplomacy is imbued with this mechanical metaphor, which works in more subtle ways than that of war-as-disease.

The analogy of a “toolbox” is popular in the literature on preventive diplomacy. The idea is that, in this toolbox, a diplomat or leader may draw specific policy “instruments” and “tools” to use in specific crises.⁵⁹ Michael Lund argues that scholars should catalogue such tools into a “codified... [and] unified classification scheme.”⁶⁰ Most of the literature focusses on the effectiveness of generic techniques.⁶¹ Across seven key texts, the description of preventive diplomacy as a tool recurs over

⁵⁶ See, for example, Walzer (1977).

⁵⁷ Emphasis added. Col. Maude, cited in Clausewitz (1982: 84).

⁵⁸ American Historical Association (1944: 3, 4, 23).

⁵⁹ Carnegie Commission (1997: 39-67), Lund (2002: 170-172, 179).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 169.

⁶¹ As Hampson (2002: 151-152) concludes, however: “In spite of the wealth of research, there are no simple lessons that can be taken off the shelf and plugged into official (diplomatic) and unofficial (e.g. NGO) practices and behaviour.”

one hundred times.⁶² Evidently, no scholar or practitioner intends it *literally*; but it is nevertheless noteworthy for what it hides.⁶³

This metaphor frames preventive diplomacy as policy engineering, and assumes that war is mechanical. The assumption is that, if the context is *x*, policy instrument *y* may prevent war.⁶⁴ This metaphor assumes a deterministic chain of causation between the preventer's action and its effect, and thus, an essential predictability.⁶⁵ Just as a hammer's effectiveness in driving in a nail may be mathematically calculated, so the mechanical metaphor assumes that diplomatic tools may have a predictable effect.⁶⁶ Even if war is complex, by corroborating lessons learned we could eventually discover its inner mechanics and craft better tools to prevent it.

It is hardly surprising that the search for "mechanisms for preventive diplomacy" is a popular trope in the literature.⁶⁷ It reveals our search for control over events. The toolbox metaphor intuitively reveals our deep urge to grasp tools with which to *manipulate* the causes of war. This desire for control is understandable; that is what policy-making is about. However, while agents may exercise control over their actions, the *effect* of that action may be neither predictable nor so easily controllable.⁶⁸

A third issue with the mechanical metaphor is its misrepresentation of agency. The actual agents – those driving a crisis or fighting a war – are more in focus in this mechanical metaphor. However, it is still the *preventer's* agency which appears to count the most. In contrast, the belligerents or parties to a dispute are passive figures in this mental picture: nails and bolts. They can only be fixed by external intervention. This instrumentalised view of agency is misleading. James Blunt, in 1999, was no more a bolt than a surgeon; the Russians were neither microbes nor a glitch. They were much more than that.

A minority viewpoint in the literature treats war, and its prevention, as a question of strategic interaction. As Lund asserts, "prevention is an idea in search of a strategy."⁶⁹ Scholars and

⁶² See Cahill (2000: 80, 87, 133, 141, 157, 158, 231), Stewart (2006: 107, 111, 113, 115, 133, 216), Hampson and Malone (2002: 119, 147, 157, 180), Wenger and Möckli (2003: 35, 39, 60, 64, 66, 83, 93, 97), Cortright (1997: 8, 16, 50, 51, 55, 56, 84, 112, 126, 181, 207, 247, 249, 254, 250, 260, 291, 293, 296, 314), Schnabel and Carment (2004a: 8, 24, 34, 89, 110, 152, 161, 162, 171, 183, 209, 215, 216, 217, 219, 225, 299, 302, 383, 339, 353, 371, 394, 401), Carment and Schnabel (2004: 6, 8, 13, 31, 48, 69, 70, 80, 90, 117, 118, 140, 199, 200, 201, 202, 204, 207, 219, 220, 248, 335, 348, 390, 404, 405), Ramcharan (2008: xv, 38, 48, 84, 145, 162, 163) Jentleson (2000: 165, 234, 300, 389).

⁶³ Cresswell (1997: 330).

⁶⁴ Lund (1998: 165).

⁶⁵ To his credit, Lund was one of the few scholars of preventive diplomacy to discuss questions of causation. *Ibid.* 162.

⁶⁶ Michael Lund was, ironically, one of the few scholars to warn of the potential abuses of this metaphor, by stressing that certain policies might have unpredictable (and even counter-intuitive) effects. Certain tools, in certain contexts, he warned, "can themselves foster conflicts rather than prevent them." See Lund (2001: 36).

⁶⁷ Acharya (1999: 110).

⁶⁸ See CHAPTER 8 for a detailed exploration of this distinction.

⁶⁹ See Dress and Rosenblum-Kumar (2002: 240).

practitioners have endorsed with this view.⁷⁰ There *cannot be* generic preventive strategies, since the context of every conflict is so radically unique. Stephen Stedman argues that preventive diplomacy should not only be understood as context-specific, but relational and dynamic. The belligerents have a say, too. “The single largest error in the conflict prevention literature,” Stedman argues, “is the tendency to analyse conflict as something divorced from its antagonists.”⁷¹ Stedman critiqued the common metaphors of war as a disease, and of prevention as something mechanical “such as fixing a leaky faucet.”⁷² When taken too literally, such metaphors could mislead policy-makers about the difficulty of preventive diplomacy.

Because they deny agency to the actors who are in conflict and who decide whether and how to use violence to pursue their goals, such analyses tend to create an illusion of ease about conflict prevention. Properly understood, conflict prevention is about convincing human beings, who strategically calculate how to achieve their goals, and who may possess incommensurable worldviews, that their interests can be and should be pursued while refraining from violence.⁷³

This is a sobering counter-point in a field lacking cumulative theoretical insights.⁷⁴ Stedman isolated one of the most troubling omissions in the literature: human agency.⁷⁵ The question of strategy, when we add the missing element of agency, has a different flavour. Rather than dealing with war as static, we now see war as a dynamic, unpredictable phenomenon of strategic interaction between living beings.⁷⁶

As another study suggested, the very act of intervening diplomatically in a conflict, even to prevent it, becomes a part of the dynamics of the conflict.⁷⁷ Various metaphors obscure the fact that “both conflicts and conflict prevention...result from relationships among people.”⁷⁸ Seyom Brown emphasises the “crucial role of leaders and decision makers in propelling their countries into avoidable wars and escalation.”⁷⁹ The reason it is so difficult to prevent war is because people often resort to it purposively.⁸⁰ However, Brown argues that, even when all the structural conditions for war are present, the resort to the use of force is never inevitable.⁸¹ “The material may be

⁷⁰ To quote Alexander L. George, preventive diplomacy “is not a strategy but an objective in search of appropriate strategies.” Cited in Stedman (1998: 67). Jentleson (2000: 13) agrees that “there cannot be a standard preventive diplomacy strategy, one size fits all, any more than there could be a single strategy for any other area of foreign policy.” A former UN special envoy, Ould-Abdallah (2000: 109), concurs: “Preventive diplomacy should not be seen as a *prêt à porter*, an instant formula for guaranteed success wherever and whenever it is applied.” See also Lund (2001: 131), Sokalski (2003: 20), Steiner (2004: 39),

⁷¹ Stedman (1998: 67).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Punctuation added for clarity. *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ See the iconic exchange between Stedman (1995: 14-20), and Lund (1995: 160-163).

⁷⁵ See also John Cockell (2002: 200); and Lund (2001: 203-205).

⁷⁶ John Cockell (2002: 187, 191).

⁷⁷ Rubin (1998).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Brown (1994: 46).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 16.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 46.

combustible,” he analogises, “but someone still has to light the fire and fan the flames.”⁸² Human agency is what may ultimately light it.

This view of preventive diplomacy confirms a conclusion reached by the Prussian general two centuries ago. Carl von Clausewitz offered a third metaphor. “War is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale,” he writes.⁸³ Warriors are akin to wrestlers, using violence to compel an adversary to submit to their will.⁸⁴ War is not separate from its participants. It is a dynamic, non-linear and unpredictable activity carried out by conscious human beings. War may be *nothing but* a strategic interaction between agents. This idea informs the next chapter on agency.

In this section, I briefly reviewed the literature on preventive diplomacy through the lens of various metaphors of war. I argued that human agency is a missing link in the literature, which I devote this dissertation to exploring. Stedman’s critique did not extend to constructing a positive account of human agency and its centrality to preventive diplomacy. This is the crucial theoretical contribution which I aim to make. I seek to challenge the assumptions about agency which underpin existing scholarship on the causes of war, and to place agency at the core of preventive diplomacy.

METHODOLOGY

The above discussion justified the intuition that human agency a concept which is strangely missing from IR debates on the causes of war and its prevention. Unlike historians, who sometimes overplay the importance of agency,⁸⁵ IR theorists drawn to the search for law-like generalisations in human affairs often efface it. In a laboratory test involving IR theorists and historians, Tetlock and Lebow uncovered fascinating cognitive tendencies. “Generalisers” who report a need for psychological closure “tend to rely on prior beliefs in solving unfamiliar problems,” and prefer “deterministic accounts that downplay probabilistic qualifiers.”⁸⁶ In marked contrast, “particularisers”, especially historians, tend to be receptive to the roles of agency, chance and contingency in international politics, and are “open to the possibility that a potpourri of processes” may determine particular historical events, rather than parsimonious, general causes.⁸⁷

This methodological debate relates directly to my research question, which is part empirical, part conceptual.⁸⁸ As I argued above, one’s position in the idiographic-nomothetic divide is much more than a methodological issue. “Theory-driven” historical research may suffer from the fallacious

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Clausewitz (1982: 101, 116-117).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Biographers, as Lebow notes (2010: 279), are particularly prone to exaggerating the role of agency.

⁸⁶ Lebow and Tetlock (2010: 139).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 162-163.

⁸⁸ The empirical question is the first half: “How have individual agents attempted to prevent war *historically*?” The second part of is a conceptual: “To what extent did *individuals* causally determine the outbreak, or prevention, of war?”

certainty of hindsight, for example,⁸⁹ effectively shaping historical events around one's theory of the general causes of war. One such theory is neo-realism, which, despite its long disciplinary reign, one historian critiqued as basically "unhistorical, perhaps anti-historical".⁹⁰ Conversely, historians who do not lay their methodological cards on the table risk smuggling theoretical assumptions under the label of objective historical facts.⁹¹ Since this dissertation borrows both from historical and social scientific methods, the risks of methodological confusion are great.

As Max Weber warned, a sharp distinction between concepts, which he called "ideal types", and history is "the hair-line which separates science from faith..."⁹² As he wrote:

It is a great temptation for the theorist to...mix theory with history and indeed to confuse them with the each other...there is an almost irresistible temptation to do violence to reality in order to prove the real validity of the construct... [But concepts] are pure mental constructs, the relationships of which to the empirical reality of the immediately given is problematical in every individual case...⁹³

Weber succinctly explained the proper role of concepts in historical research. Historical problems, he wrote, "form themselves ever anew and in different colors" in an "infinite stream of concrete events which...are constantly subject to change."⁹⁴ The "purity" of a concept is an effort to impose clarity upon the chaos of that endless stream of events.⁹⁵ Weber worried that social scientists would confuse theory and history, believing that a concept was the real force "which operates behind the passage of events and which works itself out in history."⁹⁶ Concepts, for Weber, are mere analytical constructs intended to aid us to *understand* the chaotic stream of events we call history, to *measure* reality, and to *impute* an historical event's "real causes".⁹⁷ Without such a rigorous yardstick, scholarship can easily become "a profession of faith".⁹⁸

In this dissertation, I draw on the mixed methods of historical research, and the conceptual methods of social science and philosophy. I use the concept of *agency* to impute causal weight to individuals in the outbreak and prevention of war. And I heed Weber's warning, attempting to use the concept of agency as a measuring stick, always remembering that any concept is a "utopia" which "cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality."⁹⁹ This concept, like all others, must be amended or dispensed with as soon as it violates empirical reality, rather than bending reality to *it*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 163.

⁹⁰ Schroeder (1994: 147-148) points to "the central problem of neo-realism with international history: that it prescribes and predicts a determinate order for history without having adequately checked this against the historical evidence."

⁹¹ See CHAPTER 1 for a discussion of how historians reveal their metaphysical assumptions.

⁹² Weber (1949: 110).

⁹³ *Ibid.* 102-103.

⁹⁴ Weber (1949: 84).

⁹⁵ The historical researcher, he continues, "faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality." *Ibid.* 90.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 94.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 97, 102.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 98.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 90.

To reduce the chances of methodological biases, I will first explain how I intend to develop a definition of agency in the next chapter. Consequently, I will spell out how I will go about attempting to substantiate that certain actions in each case study can be understood as the conscious actions of agents who had other choices, using the method of counter-factual analysis.

Above, I spoke of agency being the causal oomph which individuals bring to the world. A more detailed definition may be that agency refers to *the causal power which individuals appear to exert in the course of historical events in general, and war in particular*. The principal trait of agency is its human face. Essentially, every mentally-capable individual person is an agent. While this is a debated question, as the next chapter explains, I assume that abstract groups of people (such as Great Britain) or even higher-level abstractions (such as NATO) cannot be classified as agents. James Blunt is a typical agent: an individual who appears to exert considerable power in shaping the course of events. How much causal power we can attribute to any individual agent, and how much to structural forces, is an empirical question, to decide on a case-by-case basis. But theoretically, at least, the concept of *agency* in its purest form is boundless. If this appears *prima facie* utopian, that is precisely the point, as Weber argued. We cannot find conceptual ideal types in the real world. Instead, the above is merely a concept of agency which I substantiate in the next chapter.

At the outset, we face an empirical problem. There is no empirically-verifiable way to enter James Blunt's brain, measure the sum of internal and external influences upon his decision, and accurately report what *precisely* caused his action to disobey orders. A brain scan would not reveal the intricacies of Blunt's mental processes prior to and during his key decision. This neural picture, and other physiological data, would not tell us anything meaningful about *why* Blunt acted as he did, and *whether* he could have acted differently. There is no getting around the problem that we cannot enter Blunt's mind and observe his stream of consciousness. Instead, we can only rely on the crude methods of historical research – assessing Blunt's self-reporting, interviewing him, studying his personality – guided by conceptual gut feeling. In short, no amount of empirical study can validate any conception of agency. Agency – like its philosophical parent, *causation*¹⁰⁰ – is not observable to the naked eye.

But this does not mean that we need abandon empiricism and retreat to pure metaphysical speculation. Instead, this dissertation seeks to test the plausibility of one concept of agency with reference to real-life cases of preventive diplomacy. As such, the next chapter will bring the above concept of agency into confrontation with various critiques. The goal will be to hone and sharpen my concept of agency. In the case studies which follow, I will contrast this concept with real-life empirical events to determine whether it accurately captures reality. This mixed philosophic-historical approach is a tight-rope act. There is one crucial method which, if performed correctly,

¹⁰⁰ I will return to discuss the relationship between both concepts in the next chapter.

may help to ensure this dissertation walks the narrow path of logical rigour and empirical plausibility.

COUNTER-FACTUAL ANALYSIS

By its very nature, preventive diplomacy, when it succeeds, generates little media coverage. As former UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim once noted: “If it goes well, the crisis is averted, and no one is the wiser. If it goes badly, it is merely dubbed another UN failure.”¹⁰¹ Studying the prevention of war presents logical as well as empirical challenges. How to prove that preventive diplomacy actually succeeded is a logical problem which calls for a counter-factual solution.¹⁰² As Bruce Jentleson writes, counter-factual analysis is ideally suited to studying cases of preventive diplomacy.¹⁰³ In cases of failed preventive diplomacy, the onus falls on the counter-factual analyst to prove that there were missed opportunities and peaceful alternatives. In cases of presumed success, the scholar must substantiate that agents’ purposive actions were an essential ingredient in preventing war.¹⁰⁴

Another advantage of this method is that it reveals the contingent nature of history, and the importance of human agency in preventing wars. As Charles S. Maier wrote, “[for] history to provide insights applicable to present conduct, it must explain why other outcomes did not prevail—not in the sense that they could not, but in the sense that they might well have...” Studying history in this way “thereby suggests how freedom of action is foreclosed or seized.”¹⁰⁵ This method may therefore help us to study the causal role of individuals in war and peace. But its scientific rigour is contested.

Much maligned by sceptics, counter-factual analysis is frequently the target of historians and IR theorists who deem it unscientific. One historian warned against luring colleagues down the “metaphysical rathole” of free will and determinism.¹⁰⁶ Many historians have been “pathologically hostile” to counter-factual analysis, as Robert Hume writes.¹⁰⁷ One infamously called this method “unhistorical shit”.¹⁰⁸ This hostility is all the more confounding since, as Tetlock and Belkin point out, counter-factual thinking is the *only* way to draw any practical lessons from history.¹⁰⁹ Policy-makers resort to it on a daily basis, asking what would happen *if* they implemented one particular

¹⁰¹ Cited in Ramcharan (2008: xxvi).

¹⁰² Jentleson points out that the study of deterrence has also developed through counter-factual analysis. See Jentleson (2000: 8) and Wallensteen and Möller (2004).

¹⁰³ Jentleson (2000: 18).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 8, 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Nye (1988: 5-6).

¹⁰⁶ Tetlock and Belkin (1996: 3).

¹⁰⁷ Hume (1999: 105).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 106.

¹⁰⁹ Tetlock and Belkin (1996: 4); Lebow (2010: 31).

policy rather than another.¹¹⁰ And it is vital to the scientific endeavour of discerning plausible cause-effect relations.¹¹¹ As partisans of counter-factual analysis point out, the real question is not whether or not to do it, but whether to do it well or poorly.¹¹²

Weber was one of the earliest scholars to link causal analysis to counter-factual analysis. He dismissed determinists' claims that asking counter-factual questions is a waste of time.¹¹³ History, to Weber, was simply not the domain of determinism. Scholars should judge historical possibilities from the perspective of the person who actually lived it, rather than from the privileged platform of historical hindsight.¹¹⁴ And that person had "an attitude and will of his own," Weber stressed.¹¹⁵ History, if it aspires to be a science, is precisely *about* the scholar's "judgments of possibility".¹¹⁶ That is, rather than simply ratifying the past from the perspective of the present – as determinists do – the scientific analysis of history aims to attribute causal relationships between historical events. And, in so doing, it aims to infer historical possibilities. The entire study of history, Weber is suggesting, is the study of contingency.

Since causality is a product of the mind,¹¹⁷ we can only ever infer causal relations, not observe them in nature. However, to get closer to the true causes of historical events, Weber pointed out, we rely on counter-factual thinking. "In order to penetrate to the real causal interrelationships," he wrote, "*we construct unreal ones.*"¹¹⁸ To deduce the effects of President Kennedy's foreign policy on relations with the Soviet Union, for example, we may ask what would have happened *if* his assassin had narrowly missed him. Counter-factuals, if performed poorly, it is true, may descend into "epistemological slumming".¹¹⁹ Thankfully, there has been a recent proliferation of scholarly prescriptions for rigorous counter-factual analyses.

As Richard Ned Lebow points out, the "contingency of our world should be self-evident to any serious reader of history."¹²⁰ But the empirically untestable nature of history – we can never rewind the tape of past events, alter one condition, and study what changes in the present – means that many scholars *do* contest the open-ended, contingent nature of history. Hence, we need rigid standards to ensure that "unreal" counter-factuals can credibly challenge historical determinism.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 6.

¹¹² As Robert Fogel argued, the only alternative to explicit counter-factual analysis may is a concealed model, which is often poor in design and execution, and serves as a rhetorical device rather than a rigorous method. *Ibid.* 4.

¹¹³ Weber (1949: 164).

¹¹⁴ "If history is to be raised above the level of a mere chronicle of notable events and personalities," he wrote, "it has no alternative but to pose such questions." *Ibid.* 165.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 165.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 173.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 185-187. "Cause is a metaphysical doctrine," as James Maxwell wrote. Cited in Lebow (2014a: 1). I return to this debated philosophical argument in the next chapter.

¹¹⁸ Emphasis in original. Weber (1949: 186).

¹¹⁹ Tetlock and Belkin (1996: 37).

¹²⁰ Lebow (2010: 17).

Scholars have proposed many criteria to ensure that counter-factuals remain logically credible and empirically valid. I synthesise these proposals into four general guidelines, and four specific methods.

Firstly, as Bruce Jentleson suggests, counter-factual scenarios should generally be: specific; require minimal historical extrapolation; demonstrate plausible causal logic; be thinkable and open to the agents at the time; and be realistic.¹²¹ In one word, they must be *plausible*.¹²² This is an important guideline, but not an iron law. As Lebow argues, implausible “miracle counterfactuals can help us identify, highlight, and work through analytical as well as ethical problems.”¹²³ It may be analytically useful to ask, for example, whether the West would respond differently to the Syrian civil war if Syrians were endangered elephants.¹²⁴ While these are obviously absurd scenarios, which may be causally impossible to rationally justify, miracle counter-factuals may serve a useful purpose.

Secondly, a crucial rule to craft rigorous and plausible counter-factuals is to be explicit about how changing the antecedent (cause) might modify its consequents (effects). And we need to rely on evidence and theories of social and international behaviour to justify that causal relation. An historical example can translate this into plain English.

Suppose that Franz Ferdinand had not been assassinated at Sarajevo – this was a very likely outcome¹²⁵ – and had returned to Vienna safely. Would Austria still have attacked Serbia? It seems unlikely, for a variety of historical reasons.¹²⁶ But the point is that, in order to convincingly link an altered cause (a failed assassination) to a specific effect (no First World War), we must bring ample evidence to justify the proposed connection between cause and effect. Useful evidence may include, in the July 1914 case, Franz Ferdinand’s personality, policy preferences and role in Austrian politics. But we may also draw on existing theories of “the ways in which human beings are prone to react under given situations” or “nomological knowledge,” as Weber suggests.¹²⁷ Even if human behaviour is not governed by deterministic causal laws – which appears to be an inescapable implication of counter-factuals – existing theories and empirical evidence may still generate useful generalisations on patterns of human behaviour.

A third guideline, stressed by Niall Ferguson, suggests the guiding notion that counter-factual scenarios should explore “only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 19.

¹²² Lebow (2010: 44).

¹²³ *Ibid.* 45.

¹²⁴ Example adapted from *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ See, for example, Lebow (2014).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* See CHAPTER 3 for a more detailed exploration of this argument.

¹²⁷ Weber (1949: 174). Lebow agrees with this methodological advice (2010: 56).

evidence that contemporaries actually considered.”¹²⁸ Ferguson’s imperative that we *only* do this may be too rigid.¹²⁹ If relaxed, Ferguson’s criterion that we focus *particularly* on those actions which historical actors actually conceived and planned is sound advice. In so doing, we are likelier to find strong empirical support for our counter-factuals, thereby reinforcing their credibility. Hence, while not an iron law, this guideline gives bonus points to a counter-factual’s plausibility.

A final guideline, simple as it sounds, is to rebut serious critiques. The most obvious critique of counter-factuals is known as a “second-order counterfactual”. In effect, sceptics may always argue that, even *if* the proposed counter-factual is plausible, “history would have been thrown off track only temporarily, and the proposed changes would have had little long-term significance.”¹³⁰ For example, even *had* Franz Ferdinand lived, a critic might respond, *some* other catalysing event may have sparked the First World War anyway. Ironically, this is itself a counter-factual argument, albeit a poor one which provides no logical argument or empirical evidence. Disconcertingly, even IR experts and historians – according to lab experiments – tend to dismiss counterfactuals which are hostile to their pre-existing theories, while affirming those which support their beliefs.¹³¹ The positive news is that asking academics to consider various counter-factuals tends to soften the grasp of theory-driven preconceptions, and to open them up to the various contingent possibilities in history.¹³²

Therefore, the most effective response to *poor* second-order counter-factuals – the instinctual war-would-still-have-occurred reaction – is to propose *better* second-order counter-factuals. To rebut this critique, a counterfactual analyst must construct detailed, plausible accounts of exactly how the course of historical events could have changed, and what the knock-on effects of those changes could be over time.¹³³ The counter-factual which provides the most logically-coherent and empirically-valid case should naturally prevail in scholarly disputes.¹³⁴

The above guidelines set the methodological boundaries around the use of counter-factuals in this dissertation. Briefly, there are four specific counter-factual techniques which will reoccur in the following case studies. I use these to attempt to measure the agency – or causal oomph – of key individuals in each case. One key method is to hypothesise the death, disappearance or

¹²⁸ Ferguson (2011c: 86). See also Tetlock and Belkin (1996), Tetlock (1998: 639-652), Tetlock (1999: 335-366), Markman and Tetlock (2000: 313-325), Goertz and Levy (2007) and Ned Lebow (2010).

¹²⁹ For a critique of Ferguson’s counter-factual methods, see Lebow (2010: 47).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 140.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 146-147.

¹³² This “imaginative capacity”, Lebow suggests, holds the key to debiasing theory-driven determinism. *Ibid.* 138.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 57.

¹³⁴ This principle should be held up independently of the substance of each side of the argument. For example, even if contrary to my own argument, a scholar provided a strong, counter-factual argument that Franz Ferdinand – *had* he lived – would have transformed into a hawkish, anti-Serbian hawk militarist and personally ordered the Austrian invasion, *could* in principle be a strong case. But no historian or IR theorist to my knowledge has made such a case, perhaps because the evidence, in this case, clearly points in the opposite direction. See CHAPTER 3.

incapacitation, at a critical moment, of a key individual. The individual-level of analysis, which this dissertation privileges, is replete with such potential contingencies.¹³⁵ This is one of the most straight-forward methods to test the agency of individuals in a given historical case: by hypothesising their disappearance or reappearance at critical points in time. We can call this method the *Houdini*.

A second method to test agency is to inject the intervention of highly-plausible, contingent events into historical events. I name this the *sleeping monarch* method. For example, if a monarch were sleeping during key political deliberations, we can hypothesise that many factors – a nightmare, a bird or a storm – could have woken them up prematurely. This method must be in line with everyday assumptions (nomological knowledge) about human behaviour: nightmares wake people up all the time, for example.

A third method to measure the agential power of key individuals – and, therefore, the contingency of history – is to act out those intentions, designs and plans which they considered. As the cases below demonstrate, historical actors generally consider numerous possible courses of action, as they assume an essentially open and contingent future. While they ultimately choose one specific course of action, it is analytically fruitful to explore – following Ferguson – those paths which they seriously considered and *almost* took. This is one of the weightiest sources of empirical evidence in measuring contingency and, with it, the causal power of individuals in history. We can name this the *forking paths* method, paraphrasing Jorge Louis Borges.¹³⁶

A fourth method, which may be original to this dissertation, is what I call the *cameo* method. This consists of figuratively transplanting one character into another's shoes; in other words, imagining that one key individual had a different personality or set of beliefs. What if, for example, the generally weak-willed Nicholas II of Russia had had the pushy determination and stubbornness of Count Tisza of Hungary in late June 1914? Would a mere tweak of Nicholas' character have sufficed for him to stare down his hawkish generals and reassert control over Russian mobilisation in the crisis? If we can bring logic and evidence to justify such arguments, this method could reveal the importance of individuals' personalities on the course of world history.

There are other methods to test contingency and the causal power of agency, but these four methods will suffice for now. In short, counter-factual analysis is a crucial method for this study. It is a method which we intuitively use to prove, to the extent that we can, causality.¹³⁷ In so doing, counter-factuals reveal that events of enormous historical significance, such as wars, may not be

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 61.

¹³⁶ In 'The Garden of Forking Paths', Borges imagines "an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times...which approached one another, forked, broke off..." Cited in Ferguson (2011c: 70).

¹³⁷ "Although it may not be possible to prove that 'x' causes 'y'," as Lebow writes, "it may be within our power to demonstrate that without 'x', whatever happened, would not have been 'y'." Lebow (2010: 53).

driven by deterministic, underlying causes at all, but by nonlinear, contingent events.¹³⁸ In other words, this method reveals that “international relations is an open system whose outcomes are sensitive to...chance, agency and confluence.”¹³⁹ As a result, counter-factual analysis may be one of the most useful methods to measure agency, understood as the causal power of individuals in history. It is, therefore, my method of choice in this study of individuals’ efforts to prevent war.

CASE STUDY METHOD

In each of the following case studies, I will first narrate the empirical events of how certain historical actors attempted to prevent the recourse to war. Next, returning to the conceptual part of my research question, I will assess the actions of that individual against the concept of agency which I propose and refine in CHAPTER 1. In this chapter, I will set out a clear and detailed explanation of my conception of agency, and what it may resemble in real life, to allow critics to falsify any conclusion which may appear spurious. The objective is not to make historical events conform to a conceptual mould, as Weber warned, but to judge whether the mould accurately captures reality. If it does not, or does so imperfectly, CHAPTER 8 will refine it or, *in extremis*, discard it.

The upcoming historical case studies serve the explicit purpose of refining a useful concept of agency in international relations. In these case studies, I analyse primary and secondary source material in order to reconstruct the actions of individuals attempting to prevent war. In the two final cases, I have relied on interviews with diplomats and policy-makers to discover original details about attempts to prevent war. For these two cases, U.S. embassy cables leaked by *WikiLeaks* proved particularly insightful in piecing together a coherent and detailed picture of events. Using these sources is not a tacit endorsement of the illicit means which this organisation used to acquire these classified cables. Rather, using this leaked material only implies an acceptance of the reality of their existence, and a professional duty to carefully marshal, contextualise and weigh all the available evidence. If scholars abdicate this duty, more sensationalistic writers will happily take their place.

I structure the body of my dissertation using the case study method. I will now explain, in finer brushstrokes, the logic governing my use of case studies. This work consists of six case studies exploring the actions of diplomats, bureaucrats and leaders who once attempted, in a specific time and place, to prevent war. I have used six diverse case studies to attempt to increase the analytical

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 262.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 266.

leverage of this work. Much like counterfactuals, the scientific rigour of the case-study method in the social sciences is controversial.

In 1808, William Blake argued that to “generalize is to be an idiot.”¹⁴⁰ But generalising appears to be inescapable. Our limited minds may simply not be able to comprehend the nuance and complexity of social relations in their totality. This may be why we resort to conceptual language to understand reality, as Weber suggests. However, Blake’s satirical quip¹⁴¹ may prove devastatingly true of the goal of uncovering deterministic laws which allegedly govern human behaviour. In this tradition, J. S. Mill saw the goal of the social sciences being the same as that of the natural sciences.¹⁴² This assumes – as Mill assumed¹⁴³ – that people are *deterministic machines*, which neither the natural nor the social sciences have so far justified.

IR theorists have, thus far, failed to build reliable, predictable theories of international relations, raising questions about whether this is possible.¹⁴⁴ If the above discussion on counter-factuals is correct, the limitations of predictive theorising in IR may be due to the innate contingency of history and the irreducible role of human agency, which many theorists choose to downplay. I assume that the social sciences should not aim to discover the nomothetic laws governing human nature, as these may simply not exist.

Even if the above argument – which I will justify in the next chapter – is correct, social science still has a purpose. The purpose of the case study method is to search for similarities and differences in the human experience across diverse times and historical contexts. This does not imply that any objective laws govern the behaviour of humans; we need not be predictable machines.

In this dissertation, I attempt to follow the rigour of Mill’s case study method, while rejecting his deterministic assumptions about the nature of the universe.¹⁴⁵ Specifically, I follow Mill’s case selection “method of difference”. This method compares cases with similar characteristics (an individual attempting to prevent war) but different results.¹⁴⁶ For this reason, I selected case studies reflecting a broad geographical and historical spread. Geographically, the cases studied occurred in North America, Western Europe, Africa, the Caucasus and East Asia. They are broadly spread in time, with two cases in each of the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries. Finally, the cases represent a spread of various results: one clear success,¹⁴⁷ one qualified success,¹⁴⁸ one qualified failure,¹⁴⁹ and three

¹⁴⁰ Cited in Stake (2000: 22).

¹⁴¹ It was evidently satirical, as one helpful proofreader pointed out, since Blake is himself generalising.

¹⁴² Lincoln and Guba (2000: 28).

¹⁴³ See the discussion of Mill’s deterministic views in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Lebow (2010: 56) rejects “the possibility of developing good predictive theories about social behaviour. The principal reason for my pessimism,” he writes, “is the open-ended, nonlinear nature of the social world.” I find this argument convincing, and the failure of predictive theorising in IR appears to support it.

¹⁴⁵ See Lijphart (1971: 688).

¹⁴⁶ Van Evera (1997: 9-11).

¹⁴⁷ The Aroostook Valley crisis (1838).

¹⁴⁸ The First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954).

clear failures.¹⁵⁰ This might lead a reader to wonder why a study on preventive diplomacy studies more failures than successes. Failures are particularly interesting for two reasons.

Firstly, major diplomatic failures usually attract more recriminations between the actors, historical disputes and, therefore, material to study. In other words, failures are better documented; they are clearly demarcated in time and space, since a war subsequently broke out, clearly announcing the failure. In contrast, as Kurt Waldheim suggested above, successful attempts to prevent war are much more easily forgotten, seldom documented and, for many historians, are uninteresting to study. Sceptics may always charge that a war was not *really* going to break out anyway, thereby effacing or downplaying the agency of key actors. A second reason that failures are good teachers is that they expose the role of individuals in events; they reveal the faces behind the veils of states, organisations or other faceless groups. The agency of individuals, metaphorically, stands exposed to the observer's eye, more easily weighed against other factors, as more details of the historical event are generally known.

I will now briefly explain the inner mechanics of how I will carry out case studies. Each case is broken into the two halves of the research question: historical and philosophical. In the first half, I narrate the findings of my empirical research. In the second half, I analyse the causal influence of individual agents in each separate case study. It is in this second, analytical section that I use the counter-factual method. In general, I will follow Alexander George and Andrew Bennett's method of "structured, focused comparison".¹⁵¹ This requires that researchers ask the same questions of each case, and deal only with a certain aspect of each case study. This method is particularly relevant to policy-oriented research, since it marshals historical experience to inform the practical experience of the present.¹⁵² Each case study will ask the following questions:

1. What was the historical context of this specific crisis?
2. How did specific individuals attempt to prevent war?
3. How, if at all, did specific individuals attempt to cause war?
4. To what extent did the agency of individuals determine the result of the crisis?
5. How would the crises have ended, had agents acted differently?
6. To what extent might structural forces account for the result?

The first three questions are empirical, and the remaining three are theoretical. All six questions thus work towards answering the general research question spelled out above. I conclude this section with a final note on the style of the case studies.

¹⁴⁹ Kenya (2007).

¹⁵⁰ The U.S. Civil War (1861), the First World War (1914) and Georgia (2008).

¹⁵¹ George and Bennett (2004: 67).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

The level of analysis I have chosen – individuals attempting to prevent war – has implications for the style of each case study. Case studies, at this level of analysis, must be rich in detail. A detailed sketch of the environments and constraints in which individuals acted, and how their interactions in turn constrained their actions, will give us a well-rounded view of agency. Too little detail might encourage the assumption that structural historical forces govern the actions of individuals. As Vladimir Nabokov advised, “one should always notice and fondle details,” arguing that details should precede generalisations. “There is nothing wrong about the moonshine of generalization when it comes *after* the sunny trifles of the book have been lovingly collected,” Nabokov concluded.¹⁵³ In this spirit, each case study invites the reader to enter a complex and unique microcosm, treating each as unique in principle.

STRUCTURE AND ARGUMENTS

I will now set out the overall structure of this dissertation. CHAPTER 1 establishes the theoretical framework through which I study various individuals’ attempts to prevent war. This chapter consists of debates in philosophy, historiography and International Relations on the question of agency. I follow the view that a broad array of disciplines should be marshalled to understand the causes of war. “Philosophy, theology even, might come in usefully,” as Virginia Woolf wrote.¹⁵⁴ After considering various deterministic explanations for war, I explain why agency is a major cause of wars, and should therefore be central to efforts to prevent it. I set out the view that this agent-centric view of war can be justified by four inter-locking philosophical concepts: contingency, free will, agent-causation and methodological individualism.

CHAPTERS 2 to 7 consist of historical case studies of agents attempting to prevent war. The first case study, CHAPTER 2, discusses an obscure border incident between the U.S. state of Maine and the Canadian province of New Brunswick which almost escalated to great power war. In this case, I trace the actions of General Scott in mediating the crisis. CHAPTER 3 explores U.S. Secretary of State William Henry Seward’s desperate efforts to prevent a fratricidal civil war during the 1861 secession crisis. CHAPTER 4 shifts attention to one of the most dangerous crises in modern European history: the July 1914 crisis. This case study focuses on two actors who foresaw the potentially catastrophic war which might result, and acted purposively to prevent it. In CHAPTER 5, I focus on UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld’s efforts to prevent a Sino-American war during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. CHAPTER 6 studies the role of the Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya, Samuel Kivuitu, in attempting to prevent violence in Kenya’s 2007 contested presidential

¹⁵³ See Boyd (1991: 174) and Horgan (2012: 5).

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Suganami (1996: 1).

elections. Finally, CHAPTER 7 focusses on Western peace initiatives during the escalating Abkhaz-Georgian dispute in 2008.

CHAPTER 8 will synthesise the findings of the above cases concerning preventive diplomacy. This chapter consists of my major original contribution to knowledge. In it, I argue that the purposive actions of agents in each crisis are needed to explain why some crises end in war and others in peace. Even within the narrowest social constraints and the severest crises, I argue, human agents are always masters of their fates. Agents attempting to prevent war were often constrained by the actions of other individuals. However, this points not to the historical inevitability of war, but to the conclusion that individual people – not invisible structural forces – cause wars. I conclude that purposive actions to prevent war may, within limits, help to neutralise antagonists' will to fight.

Finally, CHAPTER 9 questions the practical implications of the above historical and philosophical insights. It dilutes these findings into a policy-oriented method of diplomatic contingency planning inspired by the military arts. The conclusion draws out the broader implications of this research for scholars, policy-makers and lay readers.

CAVEAT LECTOR

In summary, this dissertation is a philosophical argument with historical illustrations.¹⁵⁵ Its overall objective is to aid the judgments of practitioners of preventive diplomacy, and to advance the debate on preventive diplomacy in an unexplored direction. Before reaching the promised practical implications of this work, by way of the firm ground of historical experience, I ask for the reader's patience. The next chapter will walk readers through some of the densest and most intractable disputes of philosophy. A critical reader may ask why such a task is necessary and how, if at all, philosophy can enlighten practice. An evasive response would be to quote a French ambassador, who noted, with wit: "Yes, it works in practice, but does it work *in theory*?"¹⁵⁶ Instead, I answer that philosophy is *not* necessary for practitioners, just as a lumberjack may spend his entire life without pondering how basic physics relates to his work. Similarly, a soldier need not read Clausewitz's *On War* to learn basic drills. But the philosophy of war may assist his or her judgment in apprehending the complex, living and breathing human element of his work. Experience and philosophy should not be seen in opposition to each other, Clausewitz emphasised, but as mutually-supportive.¹⁵⁷ I therefore ask the reader to follow me through the weak substitute for experience that is philosophy.

¹⁵⁵ I draw this expression from the subtitle of Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1992).

¹⁵⁶ This ambassador was paraphrasing a proverb apparently in currency among French diplomats. It is a satirical critique of scholarly introspection divorced from practice.

¹⁵⁷ Clausewitz (1982: 91).

PART I

Philosophy

“You are interested, I know, in the prevention of war,
not in our theories, and I keep this fact in mind.”
- Sigmund Freud

Agency in War and Peace

“How can people who we call philosophers and searchers of truth...have abandoned themselves to the opinion that everything is produced due to necessity and fate?”¹
- Alexander of Aphrodisias

This chapter will explore what role human agency plays in attempts to prevent war. It begins by exploring the origins of the concept of agency itself. This takes us to Ancient Greece, where Aristotle’s notion of *contingency* contended with the popular doctrine of fatalism. In the second section, this chapter explores scientific forms of causal determinism, which deny the causal power of human agents. Here, I argue that determinism is a philosophical critique, not an uncontested scientific truth, and that *free will* is at least as plausible. Next, I argue that the IR literature has shown ambivalence on the role of human agents in the causes of war. In response, I defend the position of *agent-causation*, which states that agents are the ultimate causes of their own actions. This view remains extremely unpopular. Fortunately, truth is not a popularity contest. In the penultimate section, I explore nuanced sociological critiques of agency which attribute more (or equal) causal power to social structures. I set out the view of *methodological individualism*, which sees war as reducible to individual people. Finally, I explain how the above cluster of inter-related concepts provides a useful framework to study preventive diplomacy.

I offer two caveats before continuing. Firstly, this is, to be sure, an eclectic mix of concepts. Critics may charge that this is an indigestible philosophical buffet. But it is intended as a complementary *à la carte* menu. The above four concepts are designed to reinforce each other, giving philosophical and empirical validity to an agent-centric theory of war. This rich conceptual chapter is therefore necessary to justify the arguments to come.

Secondly, the concept of agency could be summed up in one paragraph. This would miss crucial details, including why it remains controversial, and how it relates to the causes of war. Most importantly, this philosophical foray is justified because the current literature has not made much progress in exploring questions of agency in preventive diplomacy, as I argued above. Part of the issue is that preventive diplomacy is a specialised field, which has isolated itself from IR debates on the causes of war, on causation writ large, and on the concept of agency. No matter the depth of the philosophical discussion to come, I ask the reader to trust in the strength of the tether which will bring us both back to the surface of the real world at the end of this chapter.

¹ Cited in Sharples (1977: 171-172).

THE ORIGINS OF AGENCY

The concept of agency arose as a critique of determinism. Determinism can be defined as the idea that “the events of the present are causally necessitated *in all their details* by those of the past in accordance with the laws of nature.”² The philosopher Simon Blackburn defined fatalism as the idea “that the future is already written, that what will be will be, with all our efforts to avoid it doomed to failure.”³ Philosophers are divided on how, if at all, determinism and fatalism differ.⁴ According to Aristotle, determinism and fatalism are two strands of the same philosophical argument.⁵ Either way, each doctrine comes to the same basic outcome for human agency. Determinism and fatalism say the same thing, reversing the direction of the force allegedly determining an agent’s choices. Determinism imagines an unbreakable and irresistible chain of causation from the past *pushing* agents forward. Fatalism imagines an inevitable future *pulling* an agent forward. Both suggest that humans are the passive recipients of forces beyond their control. I will now explore how these views influenced early ideas on the role of human agency in causing war.

The earliest forms of determinism were rooted in mystical or religious fatalism. A popular theory on the causes of war, in the Bronze Age, held that war was inevitable due to cosmic forces beyond the control of feeble humans. We see one example of this theory in the *Baghavad Gita*, in which the warrior Arjuna gazes at two armies ready for battle. He asks his charioteer, Krishna, why the war is necessary.⁶ The charioteer slowly reveals himself to be Vishnu, Lord of the universe, mover of men, destroyer of worlds.⁷ Krishna tells the trembling Arjuna that the death of enemy soldiers is foreordained *regardless of his actions*.⁸ Krishna reveals that humans are simply powerless pawns in a foreordained plan. Another example of this theory of war is found in Homer’s *Iliad*, in which the gods cause and prevent wars.⁹ The gods, in this ancient epic, deliberate on war and peace and determine human affairs. “O host, that which is ordained to happen by the gods,” Herodotus wrote, “man cannot avert.”¹⁰ Any efforts to prevent, avoid or escape war, if contrary to the will of Zeus, were in vain.

² Emphasis added. *Ibid.* 66.

³ Blackburn (2009: 119).

⁴ Wallace (2011: 212), Solomon (2002: 65-67).

⁵ Cited in White (1982: 231).

⁶ *The Bhagavad Gita* (2008: 12-13).

⁷ It was this sublime revelation by Krishna of his divine form which Robert Oppenheimer famously quoted when watching the first nuclear explosion: “Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” *Ibid.* 126 and 223 (footnote 3).

⁸ *Ibid.* 132.

⁹ Homer (2003: 59).

¹⁰ Cited in Lipsius (2004: 273).

The belief in the powerlessness of humans over war and peace dominated Roman thinking influenced by Greek Stoicism.¹¹ Cicero thought that “everything is from all eternity predestined according to fate.”¹² Statius, a Roman poet, wrote: “From the beginning of the world, this day was appointed for war, and nations born to fight.”¹³ “Does anyone think he has such power that he can even overcome fate?” asked the Roman poet Ovid.¹⁴ Tacitus responded: “that which is destined to happen, even if foretold, cannot be evaded.”¹⁵ The emperor Marcus Aurelius, a follower of Stoic teachings, was also beholden to fatalistic thoughts.¹⁶ Neo-Stoic philosophers, such as Justus Lipsius, focussed on how citizens could best cope with recurrent wars and man-made disasters, not on how they might be prevented. “War, tyranny, slaughter and death hang over your head, which are things truly sent from above, and do not in any way appertain to your will or pleasure,” he writes. “You may fear, but not prevent; fly, but not avoid them.”¹⁷ The intellectual roots of fatalism run deep across world cultures, religions and civilisations.

Numerous sections of the New Testament,¹⁸ the Old Testament,¹⁹ and the Quran,²⁰ for example, are steeped in fatalism. This belief may have practical implications beyond the spiritual realm. In many wars throughout history, one or both sides have variously believed that the gods were on their side. In 1095, for example Pope Urban II exhorted his flock to fight for their almighty “Commander”²¹, Jesus Christ, for example. “It is the will of God!” his followers bellowed.²² In this period, the idea that humans might control their own destinies was widely considered to be “heretical”.²³ Martin Luther famously revolted against such a notion.²⁴ Luther extended his critique of agency to a rhetorical sermon dismissing any effort to prevent war:

men write and say often what a curse war is. But they ought to consider how much greater is that curse which is averted by war. Briefly, in the business of war men must not regard the massacres, the burnings, the battles, and the marches, etc. – That is what the petty and simple do who only look with the eyes of children... we must look at the business of war or the sword with the eyes of men... It will be shown that it is a business, divine in itself, and as needful and necessary to the world as eating or drinking, or any other work.²⁵

This deterministic view of war dominated human thinking for centuries. It also served to legitimise many conquests as moral, as we saw above. Aristotle, who grew up in the aftermath of a terrible

¹¹ Cited in Ferraiolo (2006: 3).

¹² Cicero, cited in Lipsius (2004: 273).

¹³ Statius, cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Ovid, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tacitus, cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Emphasis added. Aurelius (2006: 95).

¹⁷ Lipsius (2006: 71).

¹⁸ See, for example, Matthew 24:6-8.

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 20:3-4.

²⁰ See Quran, 2:216.

²¹ Krey (1921: 33-36).

²² Munro (1895: 5-8).

²³ Baker (2003: 463-464).

²⁴ *Ibid.* 462.

²⁵ Interestingly, Luther analogised war to surgery (presumably by God) intended to save the patient’s life. Thus, we should not recoil from the horrors of war, which are for the sake of humanity. Cited in Von Bernhardt (1914: 54).

war, was one of the earliest critics of determinism.²⁶ Aristotle detailed three causes which, he argued, break the chains of causal necessity: human actions, unusual accidents and chance.²⁷ Referring to political deliberations, he argued that “nobody deliberates about things that are invariable, or about things that he cannot do himself.”²⁸ Thus, he points out, nobody deliberates about solstices, droughts, or heavy rainstorms, “for none of these results could be effected by our agency.”²⁹ Aristotle’s view of human agency was revolutionary. It implied that humans – not gods – were solely responsible for their actions, in fact that we are the sole living beings *capable* of action.³⁰ He wrote:

Therefore virtue lies in our power, and similarly so does vice; because where it is in our power to act, it is also in our power not to act, and where we can refuse we can also comply... the actions whose sources are in us are themselves in our power, i.e. voluntary.³¹

A corollary of this argument was Aristotle’s analogy of a future naval battle. In *On Interpretation*, Aristotle made the famous point that one of the two following propositions must logically be true: either there will be a sea battle tomorrow, or there will not be. However, although one of the two events must occur, neither is *necessarily* bound to happen.³² This seemed to defy the rules of logic. Aristotle solved the problem by explaining the contingent nature of future events. He rejected the “impossible conclusion” that the future was pre-determined by a force beyond human agency. Since “we see that both deliberation and action are causative with regard to the future,” he wrote, “there is potentiality in either direction.” In creating his sea battle analogy, Aristotle had determinism in his sights. There “would be no need to deliberate” if determinism were true.³³ This concept of contingency ran contrary to centuries of determinist thought. It insinuated, radically, that a potential future sea-battle was determined not by Fate, or the will of Zeus, but by human agency alone.

The above discussion raises a practical question: Does it really matter whether Aristotle or Homer was right about the causes of war? The short answer is that it matters immensely, insofar as people tend to act on their beliefs. Some theorists have argued that the deterministic belief in the inevitability of war is, ironically, a major *cause* of war. With reference to the Peloponnesian war, Joseph Nye points out that “the belief that war was inevitable played a major role in causing it.”³⁴ During the 1890s, the fatalistic belief of the German elite in the inevitability of war contributed to

²⁶ Dudley (2012: 272).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 278.

²⁸ Aristotle (2004: 150).

²⁹ *Ibid.* 57.

³⁰ Dudley (2012: 280).

³¹ *Ibid.* 61.

³² Aristotle (2013).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Nye (2005: 18).

its outbreak.³⁵ For example, an influential militarist, General von Bernhardi quoted the aforementioned view by Martin Luther approvingly. Such religious fatalism influenced von Bernhardi's belief in the "inevitableness, the idealism, and the blessing of war," which he saw as "an indispensable and stimulating law".³⁶ Berhardi theorised that statecraft, including war, is "a tool of Providence, which employs the human will to attain its end."³⁷ Other German proponents of the inevitability of war preached similar sermons of divinely-ordained war, indirectly contributing to its outbreak.³⁸

More recently, George Bush explained that it was God's will to order the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁹ "Fatalism therefore has a detrimental effect on maintaining peace," some argue, "since the widespread belief among certain groups in society that war is inevitable in the near future may well contribute to its outbreak."⁴⁰ Niall Ferguson is even more scathing: "Probably as many people have been killed by the unintended consequences of deterministic prophecies as by their self-fulfilling tendencies."⁴¹ We find support for this argument in the case study of the July 1914 crisis, during which several important decision-makers appeared beholden to fatalistic thoughts.

To modern readers, fatalism might amount to no more than obscurantist dogma and, thus, a straw man. But the above section was useful in demonstrating the historical and philosophical origins of the concept of agency. I now leave fatalism behind, since it is not a widely-held theory of war today. I nevertheless argue that we can see in modern determinism a discoloured fatalism, one in scientific rather than religious garb. I will now turn to the theory of causal determinism, which is a much more potent – and popular – critique of human agency. The next section picks up the debate with philosophers and scientists who deny the possibility of human agents exercising *free will*. Without this controversial ability to do otherwise than they actually do, agency might only mean that humans only sheepishly follow their mental states, without being able to resist them. I argue that we can reconcile our understanding of the natural world with free will.

CAUSAL DETERMINISM

In mystical accounts of determinism, external agents, such as Zeus or Krishna, played the role of puppeteer, sending soldiers to their deaths at will. In causal accounts of determinism, it is agents'

³⁵ Houweling and Siccama (1988: 4).

³⁶ Von Bernhardi (1914: 37).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 39.

³⁸ General Moltke preached the belief that "war is an essential element of God's scheme for the world." The extremely influential historian, Treitschke, echoed the theory that "God will see to it that war always recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race." Bismarck echoed this divinely-ordained theory of war. Cited in Seymour (1916: 104).

³⁹ Bush later said: "God would tell me, 'George, go and fight those terrorists in Afghanistan.' And I did, and then God would tell me, 'George go and end the tyranny in Iraq,' and I did." Cited in Cornwell (2014).

⁴⁰ Houweling and Siccama (1988: 4).

⁴¹ Ferguson (2011c: 88).

internal beliefs, neurons and states of mind which control them like marionettes. As Thomas Williams complained, “[it] is no better to be a hand puppet than a marionette.”⁴² I will now explore the modern accounts of causal determinism which challenge the Aristotelian idea of agency. These diverse threads form one core argument that humans may have agency, of some kind, but that it is not *free* agency. In sum, they argue that humans do not possess the capacity for free will. I will argue that these critics appropriate the authoritative weight of science for philosophical arguments which remain empirically untestable.

Thomas Hobbes, a central figure in International Relations theory, proposed a much more sophisticated critique of agency than fatalism. Hobbes did not appeal to God to critique free will.⁴³ He appealed to science and, specifically, to the analogy of the laws of physics. Hobbes conceived of acts of will as caused by *appetites* which the agent did not choose freely. An agent’s action was merely the result of an “alternate succession of contrary appetites, the last is that which we call the will.”⁴⁴ The conclusion appeared inescapable: “And therefore also voluntary actions are necessitated.”⁴⁵ J. S. Mill subscribed to a similar view. “A volition is a moral effect,” he wrote, “which follows the corresponding moral causes as certainly and invariably as physical effects follow their physical causes.”⁴⁶ It is worth reflecting on this theory, since its implications for agency are serious.

Hobbes reduced humans to mechanical, pre-programmed machines.⁴⁷ Our actions were merely the unfurling of the causal laws of the universe, linking past and present in one infinite chain. Pierre-Simon Laplace similarly argued that “we may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future.”⁴⁸ He continued:

An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.⁴⁹

This was the promise of Newtonian physics: to unlock the secret laws of the universe, which contained within themselves the mathematical predictability of *all* things. Carrying on the Hobbesian theory of action, some scientists believed that even human action lay within the scope of this scientific promise. Only our own cognitive limitations prevented us from being able to decipher the causal mechanisms which linked our actions into the great chain of determinism. In this sense,

⁴² Williams (1993: xii).

⁴³ Glover (1960: 275-297).

⁴⁴ Thomas Hobbes, cited in Enden (1978: 189).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 196.

⁴⁶ Cited in Ginet (1989: 25).

⁴⁷ See Pink (2004: 109-110).

⁴⁸ See Acín (2013: 8).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

causal determinism reaches remarkably similar conclusions to fatalism. Human agency, understood as the ability to act purposively in the world, is pulverised.

Some would argue that modern scientific advances have vindicated Hobbes' causal determinism. According to Konrad Lorenz, for example, aggression is an inherently natural phenomenon, in accordance with the laws of nature.⁵⁰ More recently, some neuroscientists have argued that science proves that violent behaviour is reducible to biological factors. Sam Harris, for example, sees free will as "illusory", arguing that this insight is "exculpatory" of murder.⁵¹ If an agent assassinates a president, and if the agent's decision was determined by neural activity – then the agent was never free to do otherwise.⁵² If this is true, Abraham Lincoln's assassin could not have done otherwise than he actually did. In a recent book, Adrian Raine presents a biologically reductionist argument that "biosocial forces", such as an impaired prefrontal cortex, may explain why certain individuals commit violent acts.⁵³ This theory applies to organised violence.

A causally deterministic account of war might consider individuals as interesting but impotent actors in a developing drama; extras rather than protagonists. A causal determinist is committed to the view that James Blunt's actions were not truly his own, in the sense that he could *at no point* have done otherwise. Some philosophers push the point to its logical conclusion that "no punishment or reward is ever ultimately just."⁵⁴ If James Blunt was not actually the cause of his own actions at Pristina, then we can neither praise his bravery nor blame his insubordination. Determinism relieves all human agents of responsibility in bringing about or preventing war. It is, in some mystical sense, out of their hands. A deterministic view of war looks the same regardless of the force imagined to determine an agent's action. Whether the locus of determinism is Zeus, or in the neurons firing in one's brain, the result is exactly the same:

Man is caught in a causally closed material universe in which individuals and people do not forge their own destinies, and war, or its causal factors, is an inevitable event... Strictly speaking, determinists cannot hold wars to be human events, for men are merely reactive materials incapable of choice... In a determinist universe without conscience, beliefs or purpose, wars can only be an emanation of behaviour caused by prior physical processes.⁵⁵

Alexander Moseley's portrayal of a causally deterministic view of war is true by definition; a determinist cannot deny its truth without disavowing determinism itself. Determinists see no point in deliberating on what *should* be done; they can only do what they actually do.⁵⁶ They deny Aristotle's point that deliberation is causative with regards to the future, and that the future is

⁵⁰ Lorenz (1966: 200).

⁵¹ Harris (2012: 20).

⁵² *Ibid.* 6.

⁵³ See Raine (2013) and McMillan and Mather (2013: 1062-1066).

⁵⁴ Strawson (2003: 221).

⁵⁵ Moseley (2003: 43-44).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 43.

contingent. A deterministic theory of agency must endorse Augustine's confusing explanation that humans are "freely in bondage" to the laws of universe.⁵⁷ Immanuel Kant critiqued this attempt to subsume human agency under the laws of nature: "For, if freedom were determined according to laws, it would no longer be freedom, but merely nature."⁵⁸ There is one more critique which we must tackle before moving on.

Kant raised the possibility of property dualism – the existence of an immaterial world separate from the material world. The strongest critics of free will, those committed to *materialism*,⁵⁹ deny the existence of mental states, beliefs or even consciousness.⁶⁰ Instead, they argue that all actions are reducible to the biological properties of the physical brain. And, as John R. Searle wrote, "the philosopher who objects to materialism must be endorsing some version of dualism, mysticism, mysteriousness, or general antiscientific bias."⁶¹ Materialists, Searle argues, is primarily motivated by a "terror of consciousness".⁶² If Blunt's actions were *not* reducible to physical causes, this would render his actions mysterious. However, it takes a metaphysical leap of faith to equate materialism with science.

Biological reductionists argue that the mental is always reducible to the physical. This technique, known as "eliminative reductionism" seeks to prove that every conscious mental state can be explained in purely neurological terms.⁶³ But as Searle responded, consciousness is merely "an ordinary biological, that is, *physical*, feature of the brain," albeit a "higher level feature".⁶⁴ In other words, Blunt's consciousness was the locus of his ability to do otherwise. Materialistic determinism need not lead us to conclude that Blunt was mindlessly following his own biological impulses. These are two distinct levels of analysis, and they only collapse if we deny that consciousness exists.

The sceptic may argue that free will requires being "aware of all the factors that determine your thoughts and actions," and having "complete control over those factors."⁶⁵ Some determinists argue that if an outcome (i.e. war) depends on whether certain neurons fire or not (in James Blunt's brain), then the agent must be able to *make* those neurons fire to be responsible for the outcome.⁶⁶ This is akin to arguing that one must be able to exert purposive control over the ocular processes in one's eyes to be able to see, which we obviously do not. And yet we see.

⁵⁷ Peterson (2013).

⁵⁸ Cited in Suarez (2013: 63).

⁵⁹ Moseley (2003: 42).

⁶⁰ Searle (1994: 7).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 54.

⁶² *Ibid.* 55.

⁶³ Elder-Vass (2010: 54-55).

⁶⁴ According to Searle's definition: "Consciousness is a higher-level or emergent property of the brain in the utterly harmless sense of 'higher-level' or 'emergent' in which solidity is a higher-level emergent property of H₂O molecules when they are in a lattice structure (ice)." *Ibid.* 90.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 13.

⁶⁶ Kane (2013: 269).

No proponents of free will claim that it requires omniscience. This is a straw man. As Robert Kane concludes, we “don’t have to micromanage our individual neurons one by one to perform purposive actions.”⁶⁷ This critique is unpersuasive since free will is not a mystical phenomenon hostile to science.⁶⁸ Free will is loosely synonymous with the conscious, higher faculties of the brain, including self-reflexivity, intentionality and foresight. In short, it is short-hand for the causal power which humans bring to the world.

None of this *proves* that agents like Blunt truly possess free will. Instead, this section was intended to substantiate two arguments. Firstly, I argued that attempts to subsume human action under causal determinism only produces parodies of what we ordinarily mean by agency. Secondly, I argued that the deterministic explanations of war resembled fatalism in all but name. This section sought to demystify free will, demonstrating how it might be scientifically explicable. I cannot do justice to the millennia-old debate on free will in this chapter. As Rumi wrote in the 13th century, this “is a disputation that will continue till mankind is raised from the dead.”⁶⁹ The contribution I make is not intended to solve this debate, but to link it to the debate on the causes of war.

THE CAUSES OF WAR

I began this chapter by exploring fatalism and Aristotle’s sea battle analogy, which stressed the contingency of future events. In the second section, I argued that free will is at least as convincing as determinism. If true in general, these two arguments would imply the following two conclusions about the Pristina incident: 1) that James Blunt’s decision not to attack the Russians was not inevitable; and 2) that this decision was at no point causally determined by prior events beyond his control. However, an important question remains unanswered: What *exactly* caused Blunt’s decision to spare the Russian soldiers’ lives?

Above, I critiqued the explanations that Fate, or his last mental state, or his neurons caused the British soldier to refrain from killing. However, we are still left in the dark about the origins of an agent’s causal power, and its relation to the causes of war. In this section, I seek to demonstrate the relevance of agency by arguing that it is a missing piece of the puzzle. In order to substantiate this argument, I briefly review what key IR theorists have written on the causes of war. This is not an authoritative or comprehensive literature review on this complex topic. Instead, it is a brief sketch of how theorists of the causes of war have explained – or obscured – human agency.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Benjamin Libet, whose studies are sometimes claimed to validate determinism, himself concluded that “Free Will, one genuinely free in the non determined sense is at least as good, if not a better scientific option than its denial by determinist theory.” The editors of a text on science and free will agreed that “quantum physics and neuroscience are perfectly compatible with free will and consciousness.” Suarez (2013: 287).

⁶⁹ Cited in Doyle (2013: 256).

It is useful to begin with an important distinction in the IR canon on the causes of war: that between its structural and immediate causes. Although it is not always spelled out, this is also a distinction between causes which are assumed to be beyond, and those within the control of human agents. A. J. P. Taylor offers a useful analogy delivering the same point:

Wars are much like road accidents. They have a general and particular cause at the same time. Every road accident is caused in the last resort by the invention of the internal combustion engine... [But] the police and the courts do not weigh profound causes. They seek a specific cause for each accident – driver's error, excessive speed, drunkenness, faulty brakes, bad road service. So it is with wars.⁷⁰

Historians look for specific people to assign the specific causes of specific wars. The social scientist, in contrast, often looks for the general causes of war. The IR literature features an enduring debate over which type of cause – general or specific – to privilege in explaining the outbreak of war. Over two millennia after the fact, scholars are still debating what caused the Peloponnesian War. At least two explanations are in irreconcilable tension in Thucydides' classic *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Thucydides the theorist argued that a great power or hegemonic war between Athens and Sparta was inevitable due to structural imbalances in the relative distribution of power.⁷¹ "What made war inevitable," in Thucydides' immortal phrase, "was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."⁷² Thucydides downplayed the incidents leading to war as superficial.⁷³ He saw the actions of leaders as fleeting details behind which "the real reason for the war [was] disguised."⁷⁴ (Recall Weber's warning about confusing concepts with history). Structural forces beyond human control, according to Thucydides, caused the war.

However, Thucydides recounts events which suggest an alternative explanation for the war. As Richard Ned Lebow argued, Thucydides' evidence contradicts his judgment.⁷⁵ His evidence, untainted by his theory, leads us to conclude that there was nothing inevitable about this war.⁷⁶ This competing explanation does not deny that certain structural, social or political pressures *constrained* the choices of decision-makers in 431 BC. But it does deny that these forces had the causal power to *determine* leaders' choices. Leaders were "not merely a transmission belt" of abstract structures in the unfolding crisis.⁷⁷ Similarly, it does not seem coincidental that peace was restored soon after

⁷⁰ Cited in Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2005: 107).

⁷¹ Gilpin (1988: 591-613) and Thucydides (1972: 48).

⁷² *Ibid.* 49.

⁷³ One of the reasons for this depersonalised account, Lebow intriguingly argues, is that Thucydides intended to absolve Pericles of responsibility for causing an unnecessary war of choice. Lebow (1996: 233).

⁷⁴ Thucydides (1972: 49).

⁷⁵ Lebow (1996: 232).

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁷ Lebow (1996: 252, 254).

the death of pro-war leaders on both sides, and after a new generation of pro-peace leaders took their places.⁷⁸ From this viewpoint, individuals caused the war.

These accounts appear irreconcilable. Some IR theorists have attempted to reconcile them into a hierarchy of causes of war. Kenneth Waltz made one such effort.⁷⁹ He began his seminal inquiry by raising doubts that human agency could fully explain wars.⁸⁰ He split his analysis into three levels of analysis: the individual, domestic politics and the structure of the international system.⁸¹ However, his analysis was unclear on the relative importance of each level. Waltz called structural forces, such as international anarchy, the “permissive or underlying cause of war.” But the *direct* cause of wars, he conceded, were “a number of special circumstances”.⁸² Waltz called these the “immediate, or efficient, causes of war.” This led Waltz back to individual people. States, he wrote, were only motivated to go to war “by the reason and/or passion of the comparatively few who make policies for states and of the many more who influence the few.”⁸³ Several pages after concluding that individuals cause wars, Waltz reverted back to structural determinism:

It is true that the immediate causes of many wars are trivial. If we focus upon them, the failure to agree to settlement without force appears to be ultimate folly. But... [since] it is not simply specific disputes that produce wars, rational settlement of them [by human agents] cannot eliminate war.⁸⁴

After almost endorsing individual agents being the primary causes of wars, Waltz practically rejects his own prior conclusion, and takes refuge in determinism. He even quotes a rhetorical flourish by Churchill to emphasise the point that “the destiny of mighty races of men,” rather than “trifles”, causally determine wars.⁸⁵ Agents are swallowed up by Churchill’s destiny of mighty races. Waltz’s theory of the causes of war cannot explain the causal weight of individuals, relegating it to mere trifles behind the greater causes of history. Waltz ultimately joined Thucydides’ camp, but his prevarication remains puzzling.

Hidemi Suganami argues that Waltz consistently dismisses the individual level of analysis, “as though he were waging a smear campaign against it.”⁸⁶ He engages, writes Suganami, in “[p]ositive discrimination in favour of the third level.”⁸⁷ Waltz privileges a structural explanation of the causes of war.⁸⁸ However, structural causes – such as anarchy – tell us remarkably little about why specific

⁷⁸ Thucydides (1972: 357).

⁷⁹ Waltz stressed, for example, that “if violence among states is the product of international anarchy, to aim at the conversion of individuals can accomplish little.” Waltz (2001: 2, 225).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 14.

⁸² *Ibid.* 232.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 232.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 235.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ See Suganami (1996: 20).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 24.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 25.

crises end in war, and others do not. It is just as meaningful to state that the existence of human beings, and their ability to kill each other, is a structural cause of war.⁸⁹ At most, anarchy is a necessary but never a sufficient condition of war, since it “does not make war *inevitable*.”⁹⁰ The confusion in Waltz’s analysis partly arises from confusing the causes of war *in general* with the causes of *specific* wars.⁹¹ As Suganami writes, “it is unnecessary to know about wars in general to be able to give an account of specific wars.”⁹² This conclusion has three important implications for agency.

Firstly, it goes significantly further than Taylor’s car crash analogy by challenging the argument that structural causes add much to our understanding of war. Suganami’s conclusion “is consonant with historians’ usual claim that every war has its own unique cause.”⁹³ Secondly, it suggests that there are multiple potential causal paths to war.⁹⁴ Finally, Suganami’s conclusion rehabilitates Waltz’s first image and, with it, the causal power of human agents. He concludes that “all war origins are alike in that every war results from a conscious decision, however reluctant, on the part of the key decision-makers to go to war.”⁹⁵ He also anticipates an obvious critique:

All this, it may be objected, is to overestimate the degree of freedom national leaders enjoy...their freedom of action is so circumscribed that they cannot reasonably be expected to have acted in any significantly different way. They do not choose to go to war, but rather the choice is imposed on them by the nature of the system they work in. But this line of thinking in turn exaggerates the strengths *and* uniformity with which the system...curtails national leaders’ freedom of action.⁹⁶

Suganami places human agency – and responsibility⁹⁷ – at the heart of causal accounts of war. Some IR scholars remain ambivalent on how much causal weight to attribute to humans agents, and are particularly wary of discussing moral responsibility. John Vasquez, for example, is critical of Suganami’s agent-centric theory of the causes of war, warning against “succumbing to a witch hunt for war guilt that would destroy all hope for objectivity.”⁹⁸ By objectivity, Vasquez was referring to quantitative studies using statistical methods to deduce the correlates of war.⁹⁹ However, he was not clear on how much causal weighting individuals have in determining war.

Vasquez defined the relationship between the causes of war as follows: “fundamental causes...set off a train of events (the proximate causes).”¹⁰⁰ This suggests, perplexingly, that

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 202.

⁹⁰ Emphasis in original. *Ibid.* 201.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 151.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.* 206.

⁹⁴ Waltz made a similar point, before contradicting himself (see discussion above). *Ibid.* 202

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 194.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 209.

⁹⁷ He reminds us that the Greek word for cause, *aitia*, meant ‘guilt’, so that one who caused something was responsible for its effects. *Ibid.* 209.

⁹⁸ Vasquez (1997: 91, 512).

⁹⁹ Suganami (1996: 151).

¹⁰⁰ Vasquez (2009:7).

fundamental causes *cause* the proximate causes of war. Specific actions by specific human beings are traditionally described as proximate causes. Hence, in Vasquez's formula, individuals would seem to be on board the train which is put into motion by fundamental causes. This is problematic. Human agency is again chained to the (obscure) fundamental causes of war.

Vasquez explicitly eschewed the "mechanistic" and "Newtonian" connotations of causal arguments.¹⁰¹ "Rather than seeing war as caused in this mechanical sense," he sees war "as something which flows out of a set of actions."¹⁰² In a later discussion, however, he speaks of crises leading to war as "a long train of events that the decision makers and their followers are unable to avert."¹⁰³ He nevertheless advises policy-makers on how to prevent war,¹⁰⁴ implying that decision makers *can* avert the events leading to war. While critical of Suganami's "witch hunt" for individuals responsible for causing wars, Vasquez does not provide a more compelling causal account of agency.

The IR literature is generally vague or inconsistent on the role which agents – human beings like James Blunt – play in causing or preventing wars. Jack Levy and William Thompson provide a series of conflicting conclusions on human agency. While leaders' beliefs are more important causes of wars than structural conditions,¹⁰⁵ structural causes may still "induce" a state to go to war.¹⁰⁶ While "individuals sometimes play a key role...by making decisions that send a state down the path to war," structural "forces probably have a greater impact than particular individuals on the...underlying processes leading to war."¹⁰⁷ While individuals may have had a greater impact on the onset of war several centuries ago, before the rise of bureaucracies and mass politics, "the impact of individuals...usually increases as a dispute or crisis moves closer to final decisions for war."¹⁰⁸

This see-saw regarding the role of agents in the causes of war does not reflect a flaw in the authors' logic, but rather a deeper ambiguity in the IR literature on agency. Levy and Thompson conclude that, because of scholarly disagreement over which is the more important cause of war, it is more useful to ask questions about how the levels interact.¹⁰⁹ However, this second question can only yield useful results if we provide tentative answers to the first question. If agents simply make no causal difference to war, then there is little point discussing how they interact with structural

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁰² Indeed, a large section of Vasquez's analysis is devoted to exploring the causal role of individual agents in his sophisticated discussion of the struggle for influence between accommodationists and hardliners in domestic politics. *Ibid.* 9, 216-244.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 322.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 323.

¹⁰⁵ Levy and Thompson (2010: 210).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 212.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 211.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 211.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 207. See also Levy (1998: 160).

forces, and vice-versa. I argue that there is scholarly value in remaining focussed on the question of the relative causal weight of each level of analysis, and on the individual level of analysis in particular.

As Lebow concluded, “agency is important because it is never fully a response to underlying conditions.”¹¹⁰ Despite its role as a cause of war, agency remains notoriously understudied in IR. Colin Wight has called it “a dereliction of duty.”¹¹¹ Theorists of war frequently attribute causal importance to partial *slices* of agency.¹¹² But these studies have not advanced our theoretical understanding of agency as a concept. This suggests that the unanswered question of how much causal influence human beings have over war and peace, no matter how vexing, is worth asking.

This section has provided a first sketch of role of agency in IR debates on the causes of war. Although only cursory, it sufficed to substantiate the point that agency is often overlooked. In this debate, Suganami clearly identified agency as an important cause of war. Yet this position is unpopular for focussing too narrowly on individuals’ responsibility for war. In the next section, I argue that Suganami and Taylor are justified in attributing causal power to agents for causing wars. I add to current debates by placing human agency squarely at the heart of the causes of war. To substantiate this argument, we must take a brief philosophical detour. Reader beware, we briefly dive down the metaphysical rabbit hole, or *rat* hole to some.¹¹³ This is necessary to engage with the difficult concept of causation, which is the key to understanding how agents can cause war.

AGENT-CAUSATION

In the introduction, I defined agency as the *causal oomph* which human beings exert in the world. I also suggested that agency’s parent concept is *causation*. To make sense of this concept of agency, we must be able to explain it causally. The risk is that tying agency to causation risks chaining the former to causal determinism. There is a conceptual solution to this problem, which has gone unnoticed in the IR literature. It may explain how James Blunt could act to prevent war, without his action being determined by prior causes. In other words, it offers a way to reconcile human agency with causal analysis. Although they often grapple with causation, IR theorists seldom descend into the philosophical morass of this question.¹¹⁴ Perhaps they wilfully stay out of this morass knowing, as David Hume noted, that this debate “caus’d more disputes both among ancient and modern

¹¹⁰ Ned Lebow (2010: 225).

¹¹¹ See Wight (2006: 11).

¹¹² For example, individual-level theories have investigated the causal impact of decision-makers’ assessments of threats, belief systems, strategies, psychological processes, perceptions and misperceptions. See Levy (1998: 157), Jervis (1976), Ned Lebow (1981), Richardson (1994) and Graham (1999).

¹¹³ Cited in the INTRODUCTION.

¹¹⁴ Hidemi Suganami’s account of the causes of war, as Kurki notes (2008: 89), is a notable exception.

philosophers” than any other.¹¹⁵ Or perhaps some avoid it, like Hume, preferring that all remotely metaphysical concepts be “committed to the flames”.¹¹⁶

Whatever the reason, the end result, in IR and the broader social sciences, has been the remarkable predominance of Hume’s notion of causation. This approach to causation frames debates on the causes of war, and chains human agency to causal determinism. But this is not *the* natural, uncontested concept of causation. I propose an alternative below, drawing on earlier notions of causation. In this section, I integrate human agency into a theory known as *agent-causation*. If successful, this concept may help to explain the causal power of agents in world affairs, while freeing them from the shackles of Humean causal determinism.

Philosophers speak of causation as the law-like connection between one event and another.¹¹⁷ This reflects an essentially Humean “regularity-deterministic” theory of causation.¹¹⁸ Hume defined cause-and-effect as a “necessary connection” which the human mind discerned by directly observing such “constant conjunctions” in nature.¹¹⁹ Hume built on the works of Descartes, Hobbes and Locke, all of which rejected the orthodoxy of Aristotle’s complex, metaphysical notion of causation.¹²⁰ Despite attempting to restrict all talk of causal relations to observable regularities, Hume ultimately appeared to accept that causation occurred in a reality independent of our sensory perception.¹²¹ In short, Hume’s concept is no less metaphysical than any other.

There are many nuances in this fractious dispute which I cannot explore in this section. We are less interested, here, in the exact tenets of Hume’s concept, than in its effects upon how IR theorists treat the causes of war today. The descendants of Humean causation – most of the quantitative and positivist schools in IR – have distilled his view of causation as an essentially deterministic one. The universe, according to this theory, is a “closed system”, in which causal regularities point to deterministic laws in the social world, which we may objectively measure.¹²² By discovering such laws, Humean causation implies, we may predict future human behaviour. Humean causation has become so “internalised” in the social sciences, according to Kurki, that it has simply become equated with any and all causal analysis.¹²³ This is particularly clear in IR, in which this regularity-deterministic understanding of causation is simply taken for granted by mainstream theories of IR.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ Cited in Kurki (2008: 23).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 35.

¹¹⁷ Chisholm (1995: 97).

¹¹⁸ Kurki (2008: 23).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 35.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 31-35.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 39.

¹²² *Ibid.* 38, 42, 47, 49.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 59.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 101-123

This was not always the case. Earlier theorists, including classical realists and idealists – including E. H. Carr, Hedley Bull and Hans Morgenthau – strongly rejected this regularity-deterministic theory of causation. These writers employed the methods of diplomatic historians in searching for the context-dependent causes of *specific* wars, rather than the cause of war in general.¹²⁵ In sharp contrast, later theorists such as Waltz and Vasquez, who sought to study “general patterns, not the unique” causes of war, relied upon a Humean concept of causation.¹²⁶ Their assumptions, as I demonstrated above, leave little room for human agency. Agent-causation, a competing idea reaching back to Aristotle, provides a more compelling theory of how agents may cause war. It is no more mysterious, no more metaphysical than Hume’s own reductionist, deterministic theory of causation.

Agent-causation is the simple idea that the causal buck stops with human beings. It is a deceptively simple idea: an agent is “the uncaused cause” of her actions.¹²⁷ In other words, a person’s actions are “held not to be themselves effects of prior causes,” as Clarke explains.¹²⁸ If this were not the case – if Humean determinism were true – agents could never be said to act *freely*, since their actions would be the necessary effects of prior causes beyond their control. Logically, Humean causal determinism must hold that every agent’s action is the result of prior causes, in an endless chain of causation stretching back to the distant past. In short, causal determinism, if true, deprives agents of “morally responsible agency”, since their action is never really *theirs* in a robust sense.¹²⁹ Agent-causation rehabilitates a strong concept of agency, and seeks to reconcile it with our understanding of causation.

At first sight, this concept appears plainly tautological. After all, an agent-causal explanation might be as simple as: *James Blunt* caused James Blunt’s decision not to shoot Russians. But agent-causation is a contentious idea, as it appears to challenge the doctrine of universal event causation. In the 18th Century, most philosophers – even supporters of free will – believed in the idea of universal event causation. This principle held that every event had a prior cause.¹³⁰ When Thomas Reid denied that human actions were causally determined by prior causes, his critics charged him with suggesting “that our free acts of will are totally uncaused events.” Reid replied that “the cause of the volition is the [hu]man that willed it.”¹³¹ In modern terms, as Mawson memorably put it, this

¹²⁵ See *Ibid.* 90-93.

¹²⁶ Vasquez, cited in *Ibid.* 94.

¹²⁷ See Clarke (1993: 191).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 192.

¹²⁹ Attempts to subsume free agency under causal determinism, as Clarke argues, represent “if not a complete fraud...a pale imitation” of what we usually mean by free agency. *Ibid.* 200.

¹³⁰ In other words, no event can be uncaused. By suggesting that agents are the causes of *their own* actions, agent-causation implies that this might not be the case. See Rowe (1995: 193).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

theory holds that agents are not merely acted upon by the causal laws of nature, but “add their own causal oomph to the world.”¹³²

Agent-causation has spawned an obtuse debate; I cannot descend into its minutiae here.¹³³ Three points suffice to shore up this concept. Firstly, proponents of a Humean view of causation are quick to reject agent-causation as a threat to universal event causation.¹³⁴ But it is not so. Universal event causation, as Clarke argues, need not necessarily be deterministic. It is entirely plausible to understand causation in *probabilistic* rather than *deterministic* terms.¹³⁵ Every event (such as a war) has prior causes, but this need not imply that those causes were deterministic and fore-ordained. Universal event causation survives probabilistic causation; Humean determinism does not.

Secondly, a common critique of agent-causation is that it is inherently “mysterious” or “magical”, in that it violates our taken-for-granted assumptions about causation.¹³⁶ That these assumptions are so internalised does not make them true, of course. But the critique stands. In fact, agent-causation is no more mysterious than Humean causation, since the former relies on *exactly* the same kind of causal logic as the latter.¹³⁷ Both are irreducibly metaphysical. Proponents of causal determinism forget that causation is not an unambiguous, natural phenomenon. It is a profoundly philosophical concept. Physics has no general theory of causation, and some physicists remain sceptical of it.¹³⁸ Causation may therefore be, as Lebow asserts, “not a feature of the [social] world but a concept we impose on it.”¹³⁹ Science cannot be invoked as an infallible arbiter in this metaphysical dispute, since Humean causation stands upon no higher a scientific leg than agent-causation.¹⁴⁰

Finally, this agent-causal concept of action is intuitively in line with our everyday assumptions about our causal place in the world.¹⁴¹ Agent-causation also explains how self-reflexive, conscious human beings fit into a causal understanding of world politics. As Lebow writes

The major difference between the physical and social worlds is agency. Human actors and their collectivities do not merely convey forces like electrons, or respond to them like billiard balls; they have goals of their own and idiosyncratic understandings of context.¹⁴²

¹³² Mawson (2001: 163).

¹³³ See, for example, Chisholm (1976), Bishop (1983), Clarke (1993), O'Connor (1996) and Haji (2006).

¹³⁴ See Bishop (1983: 63).

¹³⁵ “Such a view,” he writes, “reconciles free will not with determinism but with the highly plausible thesis of universal event causation.” Clarke (1993: 193-194).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 197.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 197-199.

¹³⁸ Lebow (2014: 3, 136).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁴⁰ See also Bishop (1983: 79).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 74.

¹⁴² Lebow (2014: 4).

This assertion leads Lebow to propose that Humean regularity-deterministic causation might simply be inapplicable to international relations. In its stead, he offers the concept of “singular causation”, which rests on an understanding of an “open-ended, non-linear, and reflexive political world.”¹⁴³ This concept echoes the probabilistic theory of causation outlined above. International relations may simply consist of a string of “one-offs”, as Lebow suggests.¹⁴⁴ In short, agent-causation may explain how historical events could be so indeterministic and contingent so as to defy prediction. While this theory may appear novel, even radical, in contradicting Humean orthodoxy, it predates Hume. Agent-causation harks back to concepts of causation which Hume and his followers committed to the flames.

Aristotle, as I explained above, saw agents as one of the main causes of change in the world.¹⁴⁵ His view of causation suggested that multiple, complex causal chains could “mesh together” or “coincide” to create non-recurring, contingent and inherently unpredictable events.¹⁴⁶ Tethering agency to causal determinism, Aristotle thought, would make humans no different to inanimate objects. But the distinction between both is obvious: consciousness. As Aristotle wrote:

The stick moves the stone and is moved by the hand, which is again moved by the man; in the man, however, we have reached a mover that is not so in virtue of being moved by something else.¹⁴⁷

The actions of human beings cannot be explained away by the physical laws of nature. Agency is what distinguishes humans from inanimate objects and even animals. As Aristotle said, “we do not say of any of the others that they act.”¹⁴⁸ In short, the causal buck stops with human beings. Agent-causation has at least three counter-intuitive implications. Firstly, the causal power of agents makes the future inherently unpredictable.¹⁴⁹ The second implication is that the future cannot be said to have any causes.¹⁵⁰ A third implication is that agents not only affect a causally-undetermined future, but they can never *cause* another free agent to do anything at all. Humans may be *primary movers unmoved*, as Aristotle called them.¹⁵¹ There are many critiques of this argument, which I will return to in CHAPTER 8. For now, the above suffices to prove that agency need not be beholden to causal determinism.

The concept of agent-causation explains the causal oomph which individuals bring about in international affairs. Existing theories of IR demonstrate a deterministic bias at worst, and

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 6.

¹⁴⁴ “Singular causation describes non-repetitive events that appear causal in nature but cannot be explained by regularities or laws,” as Lebow defines it. *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁴⁵ See also Kurki (2008: 27).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 28

¹⁴⁷ Cited in Kane (1995: 119).

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Dudley (2013: 280).

¹⁴⁹ Dudley (2012: 309).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 302.

¹⁵¹ Mawson (2001: 163).

ambivalence at best, on the relation between agency and causation. They are therefore ill-equipped to study preventive diplomacy. We should be clear on what agent-causation does not mean. Firstly, it does not imply that individual humans ever *control* crises and wars in a linear manner. Rather, all agent-causation implies is that any given individual – if he or she is not cognitively-impaired or physically compelled – is in ultimate control of their own actions. Secondly, agent-causation does not mean that individuals control *the consequences* of their actions. For example, Gavrilo Princip¹⁵² only controlled his trigger finger on 28 June 1914, but in no way controlled the causes of the First World War. Finally, agent-causation implies that agents ultimately act freely, but never unconstrained. The next section will explain how structures constrain agents, without determining their actions.

METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM

Even if IR theorists take agent-causation seriously, the debate is not over. Even if our lone individual can exert *some* kind of causal power in the world, it would seem severely limited in the face of the larger units which appear to determine war and peace. Many IR theories imply that “structural factors are overpowering, and the opportunities and constraints they create translate directly into foreign policy decisions.”¹⁵³ From this perspective, agents “carry relatively little causal weight,” and may simply “serve as conveyor belts for causality that rests with structural factors.”¹⁵⁴ If this is the case, the above philosophical foray was in vain. Even if agent-causation is true, structural constraints may imply a soft form of structural determinism.

This debate is about “how we define our basic units of analysis and what we think the most important causal processes are,” as Wight defines it.¹⁵⁵ More generally, it represents “a battle for the heart and soul...of the social sciences.”¹⁵⁶ Individual-level theories of war, in contrast to structural-level theories, reject the “deterministic link” between structures and agents.¹⁵⁷ In this section, I argue that the concept of *methodological individualism*¹⁵⁸ lends credence to the individualist position. I begin by exploring the philosophical implications of the levels-of-analysis problem.

¹⁵² The Serbian nationalist who assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, sparking the July 1914 crisis, which ended in the outbreak of the First World War.

¹⁵³ Levy and Thompson (2010: 129).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Wight (2006: 4).

¹⁵⁶ Elder-Vass (2013: 3).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ For the sake of brevity, I will henceforth speak of *individualism*, which readers should only read as the sociological concept which I will expound, rather than its equivalent in political theory. Methodological individualism has sometimes been mistaken for a political claim which, if accepted, would encourage humans to live as selfish, atomistic, uncooperative creatures. This is untrue. It solely implies that only individuals *exist* in a metaphysical sense, and that only *they* possess causal power. This does not mean that individuals cannot or should not cooperate; it only means that individuals are the fundamental units of society. Elster (1982: 453).

Secondly, I follow Herbert Butterfield and John Elster in arguing that history is reducible to the individual-level of analysis. Finally, I answer prominent critiques of this argument.

Waltz's level of analysis framework gives us a useful starting point. One way to imagine these levels is to picture oneself observing a miniature replica of Earth on a petri dish. This microscope has at least three levels of magnification: international, social, individual. Waltz argued that the fundamental causes of war could be seen at the first level: the structure of the system.¹⁵⁹ At the second level, we begin to see the contours of the national and cultural sub-divisions of humanity. This is the social realm. I will compare this level of analysis with the individual level, which zooms in to discern specific individuals, like James Blunt, in specific places, like Pristina. I will explore the tension in causal explanations at both levels of analysis.

Structural theorising is the rule in IR; individual-level theory is the exception. In the Humean tradition, Waltz searched for the causes of war in the structure of society, not the individual.¹⁶⁰ This is part of a long line of thinking in sociology, heavily influenced by Marx's structural determinism.¹⁶¹ E. H. Carr argued that focussing on individuals obstructed historical understanding.¹⁶² For Carr, "individuals are social phenomena."¹⁶³ From a structuralist perspective, individuals are the products of deeper historical forces. They are never perfectly free to act as they wish, but act "in the context, and under the impulse, of a past society."¹⁶⁴ If individual behaviour is so strongly determined by structural forces, agent-causation may be an empty consolation prize.

Some historians have echoed this line of theorising, using an array of methods for "reducing or nullifying agential power."¹⁶⁵ Such methods include explaining Stalin's actions as *imposed* on him by structural forces which "possessed" him.¹⁶⁶ A similar technique is to portray Stalin's actions as "*dictated* by the moods, needs, and pressures of the vast political machine."¹⁶⁷ In another egregious example, one historian explained Hitler's foreign policy as the result not of *his* own intentions, but of the collective intention of "virtually all Germans."¹⁶⁸ Hitler was merely transmitting the social forces of the collective.

Isaiah Berlin memorably compared proponents of historical determinism to "astrologers and magicians" who "speak in immense, unsubstantiated images and similes, in deeply misleading

¹⁵⁹ I have already dealt with his argument above.

¹⁶⁰ Waltz (2001: 5).

¹⁶¹ "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being," he famously, wrote, but "their social being that determines their consciousness." Elder-Vass (2013: 1).

¹⁶² Carr once reflected on his own work that it was "strongly impregnated with Marxist ways of thinking" Cited in Cox (1999: 643).

¹⁶³ Cited in Wight (2006: 73).

¹⁶⁴ Carr (1990: 35).

¹⁶⁵ See Pomper (1996: 282, 286).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 291-292.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 289.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

metaphors and allegories, and make use of hypnotic formulae with little regard for experience.”¹⁶⁹ Another historian, Herbert Butterfield, argued that these structural forces are merely concepts. Concepts, he argued, like Weber, exert not causal power upon individuals:

The genesis of historical events lies in human beings. The real birth of ideas takes place in human brains. The reason why things happen is that human beings have vitality... If we... think of the French revolution as a ‘thing’... above all, if we start imagining that the French Revolution stood up and did something as though it were a self-acting agent (when we really mean that a certain man or men came to some decision or other) ... then we are moving into [a] world of optical illusions...¹⁷⁰

Butterfield concludes that “everything in history is ultimately referable to individual people.”¹⁷¹ The attempt to abstract general knowledge from history “irrespective of personalities and incidentals”, he warned, presents a distorted view of individuals “moulded by circumstance, as creatures manufactured by history, rather than as makers and choosers of their course.”¹⁷² This deterministic bias is evident in teleological theories of history.¹⁷³ In reality, Butterfield argues, no deterministic law guides the historical process, “for the wills and choices of human beings here in the present are always interposed between the two.”¹⁷⁴ No historian has the “data which would authorize him to prejudge the question of human free will and responsibility,” which are not reducible to structural forces.¹⁷⁵

Returning to the 1999 Pristina incident helps to reinforce this point. IR theorists, like legal scholars, personify states as “a useful fiction, analogy, metaphor, or shorthand for something else.”¹⁷⁶ For the sake of convenience, for example, we may speak of NATO and Russia *as if* they were unitary, strategic, purposive agents. But it is a bridge too far to reify these concepts as if they were *actual* people,¹⁷⁷ so that the will of these titans absorbs those of the individuals composing it. At the structural level of analysis on our microscope,¹⁷⁸ NATO appears to be a plausible agent. However, a problem arises when we look for evidence of NATO acting consciously. As I argued above, consciousness is the locus of free will, giving human agents their causal power. NATO does not pass this basic benchmark of agency.

This conceptual issue demands that we adjust our lens to a lower level in searching for agency. The individual-level of analysis reveals not only the causal power of individual agents, but a more

¹⁶⁹ Berlin (1955: 78-79).

¹⁷⁰ Butterfield (1955: 2).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 11.

¹⁷³ “As a steam-hammer converts a sphere and a cube alike into sheet metal,” wrote Trotsky, “so under the blow of too great and inexorable events, resistance is smashed and the boundaries of ‘individuality’ lost.” Cited in Pomper (1996: 288).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 2.

¹⁷⁶ Wendt (2004: 289).

¹⁷⁷ For a defence of the idea that states are *actually* people in some meaningful sense, see *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ By structural, here, I refer to social structures, rather than the structure of the international system.

subtle, nuanced and realistic picture of the world. A structural-level explanation of the 1999 Pristina incident would have to appeal to abstractions, such as the balance of power, attributing innate “causal properties” to such concepts.¹⁷⁹ This is to forget, however, that the balance of power is an arbitrary construct, or an ideal type as Weber wrote. Or, to return to Butterfield, concepts such as the balance of power “do not exist except as abstract terms and convenient pieces of short-hand.”¹⁸⁰ Closer inspection of the Pristina incident reveals this to be the case.

James Blunt was not the only individual who helped to prevent a clash in Pristina. The actions, stubbornness and numerous phone calls of General Jackson – who resisted General Clark’s orders to attack – are a necessary part of any causal story of how war was avoided that day.¹⁸¹ Even more telling is the part played by a little-known Russian general, who allegedly manoeuvred *intentionally* to bring this entire crisis about in the first place. General Viktor Zavarzin was Russia’s first representative to NATO. He was due to receive a promotion when NATO began bombing Serbia in 1999. His superiors were livid that Zavarzin failed to warn them of NATO’s actions, and intended to sack him. Russian sources allege that Zavarzin masterminded the Russian paratroopers’ surprise storming of the Pristina airport, persuaded the Chief of the General Staff to support it, who presented it to Yeltsin for approval half an hour before the operation. When this plan was approved, it became “the pinnacle of an otherwise obscure...career.”¹⁸² Zavarzin was finally promoted for his wild gamble.

A structural-level explanation of the Pristina incident would either ignore or explain away Zavarzin’s individual actions as responses to structural forces. However, an obscure bureaucrat’s career path, his grievances and burning ambition appear to be divorced from structural explanations. We cannot so easily dismiss this individual’s actions, which appears central to the causes of the Pristina incident. Moreover, Zavarzin reappeared in Pristina itself and, after negotiations with General Jackson – aided by the latter’s offer to share his flask of whisky¹⁸³ – agreed to a peaceful de-escalation. Only the individual level of analysis can reveal the causal complexity of international relations, and the crucial role of individuals in war and peace. Since they omit individuals’ career ambitions, personal grievances and flasks of whiskey, structural theories cannot adequately explain the causes of this crisis.

This individual-centric view of history links back to Aristotle’s concept of the contingency, openness and indeterministic nature of the future, and on the probabilistic nature of causation.¹⁸⁴ It

¹⁷⁹ Lebow (2014: 51).

¹⁸⁰ Butterfield (1955: 4).

¹⁸¹ See Jackson (2007).

¹⁸² Read the full details in (Reeves 1999).

¹⁸³ Jackson (2007).

¹⁸⁴ Butterfield (1955: 4).

emphasises upon how “small a pivot the grandest kind of history sometimes turns.”¹⁸⁵ This concept has been termed *methodological individualism*. Jon Elster, one of its main proponents, defines it as the idea that

all social phenomena can in principle be explained without referring to anything but individuals – their actions, properties and relations. Social aggregates have no explanatory power over and above that possessed by the individuals who make them up.¹⁸⁶

This may well be “trivially, indeed boringly true.”¹⁸⁷ Elster labelled as “mysticism” theories which cast social structures as exercising causal power over individuals.¹⁸⁸ Without explaining how they work at the individual level, he wrote, structures “are condemned to remain at the level of speculation.”¹⁸⁹ The “elementary unit of social life is the individual human action,” Elster argued.¹⁹⁰ Lebow similarly argued that “human beings [may be] about the only things in the social world that might conceivably be described as a natural kind with causal properties.”¹⁹¹ Methodological individualism is logically consistent with the preceding concepts in this dissertation: contingency, free will and agent-causation. This collection of concepts fully explains the causal power of individual agents over war and peace. However, individualism faces at least three serious critiques, which I will briefly address.

A first critique concerns the problem of eliminative reductionism. Just as biological reductionists argue that mental states are reducible to physical processes, individualists reduce the causal powers of social structures to individuals.¹⁹² However, individualists, Elder-Vass argues, cannot justify why we should remain at the individual level of analysis. Therefore, they cannot stop an infinite regress since the same logic can reduce humans’ causal power to their cells, down to their molecules, which are further reducible to atoms, *etc.*¹⁹³ Why we should draw a line between the individual and any further levels of analysis above (social) or below (biological) therefore seems *ad hoc*.¹⁹⁴ It is relatively straightforward to explain why this choice is warranted. We may justifiably halt at the individual level of analysis because agency is rooted in an individual’s consciousness, as I argued above.¹⁹⁵ International systems and states, like molecules and atoms, do not display consciousness and self-reflexivity. Individuals are unique in that regard.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Elster (1993: 334).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Cited in Hollis and Smith (1991: 404).

¹⁸⁹ See Elster (1982: 454).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Elder-Vass (2013: 55).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* 55.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ For a counter-argument to the idea that society is reducible to individuals, and that individuals’ unique causal power stems from their consciousness, see Wight (2006: 46-49).

A second critique holds that individualism mirrors the excesses of structural determinism.¹⁹⁶ Wight makes a similar argument.¹⁹⁷ If both positions are mutually-exclusive, it only seems rational to reach a compromise in the middle.¹⁹⁸ However, attempts to combine structural and agential explanations are often ambiguous on exactly what is causing a social outcome. Despite rejecting “rampant individualism,” Wight concludes that structures only “decisively influence” agents.¹⁹⁹ Elder-Vass makes a similar argument that agents are “affected by social causes without being *fully determined* by them.”²⁰⁰ More balanced accounts of structure suggest that “agency is located in structure, but is not determined by it.”²⁰¹

Such definitions of social structure, purged of determinism, are compatible with individualism.²⁰² But, in such diluted form, structure becomes a euphemism for social context. It is emptied of its causal properties. No compromise solution seems to give structuralist and agent-level theorists what they want. Either structure, watered down, loses its deterministic edge, or a weakened agency loses any meaningful causal power. Such a bargain need not be struck. It does not logically follow that, because these two viewpoints are antithetical, the truth must be somewhere in between. Max Weber critiqued attempts to compromise on “the middle course” between opposing viewpoints in science, which he said “is no truer even by a hair’s breadth”.²⁰³ Individualism must make a major concession to structuralism, I argue later in this dissertation.²⁰⁴ But this concession comes in light of the empirical findings in case studies to come, and it not evident at this conceptual stage of the discussion.

A third critique of individualism holds that James Blunt’s actions in 1999 were at least partly caused by the prior actions of “macro actors” like NATO and Russia. Elder-Vass argues that events like wars reflect the causal power of macro-actors which “act *through* individual humans” simultaneously.²⁰⁵ On this account, “we must accept that organisations are causally responsible for the behaviour of their members...”²⁰⁶ Elder-Vass argues that we can meaningfully speak of an army exerting its causal power *through* the minds and bodies of individual soldiers.²⁰⁷ When they are

¹⁹⁶ Elder-Vass (2013: 55).

¹⁹⁷ Wight (2006: 115).

¹⁹⁸ Moreover, since most modern sociologists have rejected hard structural determinism, individualists are left to appear unduly intransigent. According to Elder-Vass (2013: 84).

¹⁹⁹ Wight (2006: 198, 199, 115).

²⁰⁰ Elder-Vass (2013: 87).

²⁰¹ See Bieler and Morton (2001: 27).

²⁰² This definition of structure-as-social-constraints is entirely compatible with individualism. See Wight (2006:128).

²⁰³ Weber (1949: 57) stressed that this injunction only applied to science, not politics. He wrote that it can be “obligatory subjectively for the practical politician, in the individual case, to mediate between antagonistic points of view...But this has nothing whatsoever to do with scientific ‘objectivity’.”

²⁰⁴ See Chapter 8.

²⁰⁵ Elder-Vass (2013: 180).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 173.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 186.

charging into battle, soldiers are unwittingly conduits of the army's structural power.²⁰⁸ On this view, world leaders only exercise "some personal influence" in world politics, and only "on behalf of the states".²⁰⁹ Social structures therefore act *through* agents' consciousness. The example of a military charge provides a fitting note on which to end.

Armies spend considerable energy instilling obedience into recruits, attempting to turn them into cogs in a machine. In a limited sense, soldiers do represent social structures. But to argue that these collectives fully or partly *cause* the individual's behaviour is a bridge too far. Clausewitz mocked attempts by theorists to treat an army "like an automaton...intended to unwind its activities like a piece of clockwork," without factoring in "the free activity of the mind[s]" of the soldiers.²¹⁰ His portrait of actual battle dispels this mechanistic image, and captures the elements of chaos, choice and chance in every war.²¹¹ Secondly, James Blunt's insubordination suggests that, if his act of will was enough to overcome the influence of his army training, structural forces do not exert irresistible force upon individual. Elder-Vass concedes that social norms, institutions and pressures only "tend to" encourage certain behaviours.²¹² Whether, and to which extent, they comply with this pressure is clearly up to individual agents. Thus, the causal power of social structures is that of a non-deterministic influence upon agents' behaviour. We can therefore conclude that individuals are the fundamental units of social life, and the direct causes of war and peace.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has contributed to explaining why agency is critical to understanding the causes of war, and efforts to prevent it. I began this chapter with the case of how James Blunt may have prevented a NATO-Russia war in 1999. I then proceeded to discuss various forms of determinism. Following Aristotle, I argued that agents act causally in the world, but that their actions are not determined by prior causes. This is due to the *contingency* of history. Secondly, I argued that *free will* was a scientifically plausible, if not more compelling, possibility than causal determinism. This paved the way for my discussion of the causes of war, in which I supported the position of *agent-causation*. Finally, I argued that history is fundamentally reducible to individuals, and that agents are the most efficacious causes of war and peace, a position known as *individualism*.

The above four concepts combine into the guiding assumption of this entire dissertation: human beings like James Blunt are the ultimate causes of war and peace. This conclusion will allow me, in the follow historical case studies, to focus narrowly on six agents and their efforts to prevent war.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 185.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 183.

²¹⁰ Clausewitz (1982: 181).

²¹¹ *Ibid.* 159-160,

²¹² *Ibid.* 126.

Unlike many IR studies, I self-consciously eschew structural deterministic explanations of history. I instead follow the philosophical conclusion that we must look to *individuals* for the causes of war and peace. This chapter has served to justify my chosen unit-of-analysis – the individual – which I argue has the greatest causal impact on the social world. I conclude, with Elster, that this is almost “boringly true.” However, I argue that this boring truth needs a strong defence team, as it has almost been run out of the social sciences.

The next six case studies take us to moments of historical crisis, spread out across three centuries, four continents, with contexts ranging from great power crises to an electoral crisis. The only constant across these six cases is my focus on the actions of specific *individuals*, to try to apprehend the causal influence of agents on the course of events. The above philosophical framework directly informs my assumptions and methods. On this understanding, we now leave the dark well of philosophy, pulled up by the empirical tether I promised earlier. The first real-life individual whose efforts to prevent war we study is General Winfield Scott.

PART II

History

“Economic factors, financial situations, wars, political crises, do not cause anything, do not exist except as abstract terms and convenient pieces of short-hand... It is [people] who make history.”
- Herbert Butterfield¹

¹ Butterfield (1955: 2).

General Scott – The Aroostook Crisis, 1839

“It is by timely and instant measures of prevention...that the mutual calamities, now imminent, may be averted.”

- Henry S. Fox, *British ambassador*¹

We now emerge from metaphysics, and surface on the fields of history. This is the first of six case studies in this dissertation. The purpose of these case studies is to provide data against which to test the above philosophy. For now, we leave the armchair and venture out to the north-eastern boundary between the United States and Canada, in the year 1838. The fertile Aroostook Valley, bordering Maine and New Brunswick, almost became a major battlefield of the 19th Century. Border incidents escalated from a local competition over timber to the brink of Anglo-American war. After briefly explaining the context, I will recount General Winfield Scott's successful mediation of this dangerous crisis. Finally, I analyse the mystery of Governor John Fairfield's change of mind after almost committing to war, for which – I argue – Scott's mission provides the most compelling explanation.

BACKGROUND

In 1837, rebellions broke out in several provinces of Canada. This sparked a diplomatic crisis between the British, who ruled Canada at the time, and the United States (U.S.). The crisis escalated sharply when the British ambassador to Washington, Henry S. Fox, accused the U.S. of supporting the Canadian rebels.² Fox warned of a possible war between both powers, and appealed to the U.S. to avoid it.³ Despite a string of incidents, the U.S. cooperated with Canada to arrest conspirators in its jurisdiction.⁴ Secretary of State Forsyth reassured the British ambassador that the U.S. would help suppress the rebellion to prevent a major war.⁵ Although the border crisis continued to inflame diplomatic relations throughout 1838, cool heads prevailed to prevent escalation for now.

The U.S. sent General Scott to the region to prevent American citizens from getting involved in the Canadian rebellion.⁶ “In the first winter,” Scott wrote in his autobiography, “one of those incidents occurred which make history dramatic, and which illustrate how much depends on individual men and single events.” In January 1838, Scott confiscated a ship – the *Barcelona* – which American partisans intended to sell to Canadian rebels. However, British ships patrolling the

¹ Manning (1975: 407-408).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* 44-45.

⁵ *Ibid.* 58.

⁶ *Ibid.* 33-34.

same waters intended to sink the *Barcelona* for good measure. Scott recounts the incident in the third-person:

The cannon on either shore were pointed, the matches lighted, and thousands stood in suspense...On Scott's note and his personal assurances alone depended the question of peace or war. Happily, these assurances had their just effect. The *Barcelona* passed along. The British did not fire. The matches were extinguished, and the two nations, guided by wise counsels, resumed their usual way.⁷

The assurances Scott refers to were those which the general had written on his lap earlier, and sent to the British officer on the incoming ship. Scott had warned the British against attacking, and gave personal assurances that he would restrain his own side in exchange. A British attack on the *Barcelona*, he warned, meant certain war. The British officer complied.⁸ Although Scott's biography engages in blatant self-glorification,⁹ this incident reveals the causal sway which Scott exercised in 1837, and foreshadows that which he would exercise in the Aroostook Valley.

A more dangerous Anglo-American crisis threatened to explode in early 1838. This time, the danger lay along the disputed border between Maine and New Brunswick. Both sides claimed the Aroostook Valley. The dispute had its origins in the imprecise wording of the Treaty of Paris, which had formally ended the U.S. war of independence. The text of the treaty did not correlate with the commonly-accepted names of geographical features.¹⁰ The territorial dispute was worsened by other irritants, including lingering animosities from the war of 1812, British strategic interests, and rivalry between local lumberjacks for the wood in the fertile Aroostook and Madawaska Valleys.¹¹ These irritants, according to Howard Jones, "sharpened concern over the unsettled north-eastern boundary and had the potential of forcing Great Britain and the United States into war."¹²

Britain's key strategic interest was to maintain unimpeded access to the St. John River. This was the only route via which troops from Britain could reach Canada when the St. Lawrence froze over each winter.¹³ British generals also "wanted to keep the United States away from the hills overlooking the St Lawrence River, especially near Quebec."¹⁴ These heights, which the Americans claimed, would give the U.S. military a stranglehold on the supply of British troops to Canada. The precise historical claims and legal arguments of each side, and the details of previous initiatives to resolve this dispute, are unimportant for our purposes. The main point is that each side claimed the entirety of the Aroostook Valley as its rightful territory.

Maine sent a U.S. surveyor to distribute taxes from the federal surplus to this valley in 1838. He was swiftly arrested by the Canadian authorities for this act of sovereignty. The diplomatic

⁷ Scott (1864: 316-317).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ He also washes his hands of all responsibility in the removal of the Cherokee Indians. *Ibid.* 317-318, 328, 353.

¹⁰ Jones (1975: 519).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 519-520.

¹² *Ibid.* 519.

¹³ Dunbabin (2011: 40).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

managers of the incident dealt with this incident tactfully. Forsyth's conciliatory approach to foreign policy earned him the scorn of some of his contemporaries. A Maine politician was "utterly disgusted" by Forsyth's attempts to negotiate a compromise boundary line with the British.¹⁵ For his part, Forsyth's main correspondent, British ambassador Fox, has gone down in history as "an inveterate gambler and often in debt," as well as being "indolent and lazy".¹⁶ Indeed "hardly anyone," according to one historian, "ever had a good word to say of him."¹⁷ Whatever their faults, Forsyth and Fox at least had the merit of being moderates.

THIS GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

By 1839, Britain and the U.S. were losing control of the situation on the ground. The Democrat John Fairfield, Governor of Maine since 1838, warned the state legislature that Canadian lumberjacks had stolen hundreds of thousands of trees in the Aroostook Valley. The local legislature appropriated \$10,000 to raise an armed posse to defend the territory.¹⁸ Next, the leader of the Maine posse, Rufus McIntire, arrested "trespassers", including New Brunswick's warden of the disputed territory. In retaliation, a band of Canadians seized McIntyre at night and jailed him in Canada.¹⁹ Sir John Harvey, Lieutenant-General of New Brunswick, issued a proclamation denouncing the Maine posse's "invasion" of Canada, and called for military enlistments.²⁰

Newspapers in Maine bayed for revenge.²¹ The press was pushing for war in both countries, magnifying local tensions into international incidents.²² One reporter recounted the mood in Maine on February 25: "a great stir and bustle. The foundries are still at work casting balls...men are busy in manufacturing cartridges...stores and munitions of war, load after load, are passing every hour for the scene of operations."²³ One patriotic song intoned:

We'll feed them well with ball and shot,
We'll cut these Red-coats down,
Before we yield to them an inch
Or title of our ground... [and]
With justice, and with glory fight,
For these Aroostook lands.²⁴

Another report from Maine noted that "swords that have been quietly rusting in their scabbards since the time of the Revolution, and muskets that have never known gun-powder...are called into

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 204.

¹⁶ Jones (1975: 21).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 22.

¹⁸ Jones (1975: 523).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Lowenthal (1951: 318).

²¹ *Ibid.* 524.

²² *Ibid.* 316.

²³ *Ibid.* 319.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

requisition... The general sentiment is to resist even unto blood.”²⁵ Governor Fairfield gave fiery, patriotic speeches to the troops in Augusta. “The time has come,” he told them, “when we must make a vigorous and manly defense of our soil...”²⁶ The few dissenting voices were crushed by a swelling, national war fever.²⁷

To favour peace was utterly ignominious and worthy of shame for generations to come. “God grant,” prayed one newspaper, “that no pacific may retard us [for war].”²⁸ *The New York Gazette* warned that any association with the ‘peace party’ would “ruin a man unto his third or fourth generation.”²⁹ One Boston newspaper reported men growing their moustaches, because “those who are deficient in these hairy appendages cannot with a good grace shout war! WAR! WAR!”³⁰ The *New York Herald* reported from that city:

The excitement which prevails in this city is of the most extraordinary character. It seems to be a unanimous throb of determination, among all parties and all classes, to support the claims of the United States... at every and all hazards. The opposition seems more determined to resist the pretensions of Great Britain than even the Administration... This topic now absorbs every other subject... at the *soirees* in the hotels, along the avenues, in the lobbies, nothing is heard but questions and conversation on Maine. Even among the pretty women there is a strong warlike disposition.³¹

Finally, in one of the most hyperbolic pieces of mouth-frothing, jingoistic journalism, one paper wrote that “governor Fairfield has it in his power to become second only to Moses and Washington.” The newspaper advised that the Governor of Maine should invade all of Canada, set up a Republican Government, appoint himself President, and annex Canada for the Union. “All this he can do in twelve or twenty-four months at the furthest, if he is the man we take him to be...”³² The Illinois militia was ready to fight for Maine, and Governor Fairfield was told by a New Yorker that “every State in the Union will pour forth her troops to sustain your just war...”³³ In the press and in popular opinion, the warrior spirit prevailed.

As a sign that the situation was still manageable in the actual disputed area, British and American troops drank together at the local pub in Houlton. The odd drunken bar fight was the extent of any violence.³⁴ But politicians on both sides were increasingly constrained by the popular calls for war, fanned by the belligerent press, and were inching closer to war. In a speech to the

²⁵ *Ibid.* 321.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 322.

²⁷ Reverend Caleb Bradley was one of the rare dissenting voices. Upon being conscripted, he wrote in his diary: “Has it come to this – must we be sacrificed to gratify the wicked ambition of unfeeling demagogues who happen to be in authority... Both our political authorities are mad – and worse. It seems as though they had combined to ruin our country. I detest them! I abhor their doings in this respect!” *Ibid.* 322.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 323.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 324.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 324.

³¹ *Ibid.* 327.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.* 325.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 323.

Augusta legislature, Governor Fairfield advised sending 300 reinforcements to the Aroostook, and asked for an extra 10,000 militiamen.³⁵ The legislature unanimously appropriated \$800,000 to raise that army. Fairfield immediately sent 4,000 of them to the Aroostook. Justifying his decision to his son, he wrote that “although it is wicked to fight under most circumstances, it is not wicked, in my opinion, to fight for the defence of our country.”³⁶ The difficulty was not to recruit volunteers, Fairfield wrote to his wife, but to hold back a flood of recruits.³⁷ Fairfield appealed to the president for federal troops to support the war effort. He then warned Governor Harvey against intervening in Maine’s territory.³⁸

A war scare seized New Brunswick when newspapers warned of an impending American invasion. Governor Harvey, who hoped to avoid war, still felt compelled to deliver fiery speeches to his own troops. He was no doubt buoyed by the pledges of military aid from the lieutenant governors of Lower Canada and Nova Scotia.³⁹ Attempting a good-faith measure, Harvey released McIntyre, leader of the Maine posse, on parole, and sent a letter to Fairfield. But direct communication did not help. Fairfield, upon receiving the letter from McIntyre’s hand on 21 February, concluded that “it would appear that collision is inevitable.”⁴⁰ Three days later, Fairfield wrote again to his wife that he was resolved to solve this dispute once and for all. “Now is the time to strike a blow for our rights,” he concluded. If he let “this golden opportunity pass,” he wrote, “we shall deserve to lose our territory and win the contempt of the world.”⁴¹ Fairfield was about to start the largest war in living memory.

THE GREAT PACIFICATOR

Decision-makers in Washington and London were the last barrier to certain war. President Van Buren, who had clung to the hopes of peace, now appeared more anxious. The president “entertain[ed] much less hope of avoiding a serious collision between the two countries.”⁴² The pressure was acute. In Maine towns supportive of his own party, mobs burned effigies of President Van Buren, who found himself in a political dilemma.⁴³ “If he throws cold water upon us, and treats the subject coolly, and in his non-committal style,” a critic pointed out, “he may bid farewell to the votes of Maine forever.”⁴⁴ While supporting Maine’s territorial claims, he criticised Governor

³⁵ Jones (1975: 524).

³⁶ Staples (1922: 267).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 266.

³⁸ Jones (1975: 525).

³⁹ *Ibid.* 526.

⁴⁰ Staples (1922: 266).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 268.

⁴² *Ibid.* 254.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 329.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 327.

Fairfield for his call to arms. As Jones writes, Van Buren's balanced apportioning of blame "succeeded only in gaining the enmity of almost everyone."⁴⁵ In the end, Van Buren buckled to the hawks. On 28 February, both houses of Congress authorised the president to resist British aggression in the Aroostook Valley. Van Buren signed the bill in March, appropriating ten million dollars for arms and authorising him to call out 500,000 volunteers.⁴⁶ This turned a border dispute into a diplomatic crisis.

Despite complaining of Maine's aggressiveness, Britain was not an innocent bystander. Lord Palmerston "considered the border events merely a nuisance and seemed willing to accept almost any compromise settlement," according to one scholar.⁴⁷ When relations deteriorated, Palmerston asserted Britain's right to exercise *de facto* sovereignty over the disputed territory pending its final resolution.⁴⁸ He further warned that Maine's actions "if persevered in, must lead to hostile collisions between that State and the Government of New Brunswick."⁴⁹ This swing from negligence to a hard line defence of British sovereignty worsened the situation.⁵⁰ Another common American grievance was the fact that Palmerston did not deal with the dispute punctually, leaving his ambassador in Washington, Henry S. Fox, frequently without instructions.⁵¹ On one occasion, the U.S. ambassador in London complained that he had pressed Palmerston for *one month* to respond on a particular topic.⁵² All of the above anecdotes tend to confirm Thomas Le Duc's accusation that Palmerston demonstrated an "inability to formulate a rational policy toward the United States."⁵³ At least, Britain's indecision sent mixed signals to Washington.

On 27 February, the British ambassador Fox and Secretary of State Forsyth signed a memorandum designed to prevent hostilities. This document was the circuit-breaker for which both central governments had grasped. The Fox-Forsyth memorandum set out the fact that Great Britain and the United States agreed to disagree for now, and affirmed the principle that the boundary dispute should be settled amicably via negotiation. The memorandum contained the following short-term commitments on behalf of New Brunswick and Maine:

1. Her Majesty's officers will not seek to expel, by military force, the armed party which has been sent by Maine into the district bordering on the Aroostook River;

2. But the Government of Maine will, voluntarily, and without needless delay, withdraw beyond the bounds of the disputed territory any armed force now within them;

⁴⁵ Jones (1975: 531).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 532.

⁴⁷ See Lord Brougham (1843), Jones (1975: 521, 523).

⁴⁸ McCue (2000).

⁴⁹ Manning (1975: 429).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 431; 497.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 468.

⁵² *Ibid.* 501.

⁵³ Le Duc (1947: 31).

3.And if future necessity should arise for dispersing notorious trespassers, or protecting public property from depredation by armed force, the operation shall be conducted by concert, jointly or separately, according to agreements between the Governments of Maine and New Brunswick.

4.The civil officers in the service respectively of New Brunswick and Maine, who have been taken into custody by the opposite parties, shall be released.

5.Nothing in this memorandum shall be construed to fortify or to weaken, in any respect whatever, the claim of either party to the ultimate possession of the disputed territory.⁵⁴

Fox was acting without instruction from his capital, London. He had made a conscious compromise in recognising the *de facto* territorial dispute, but believed it to be necessary to prevent war.⁵⁵ President Van Buren and Lord Palmerston quickly endorsed the memorandum. But neither capital had the power to impose those terms upon New Brunswick or Maine. It was far from clear that the parties could still be persuaded to avoid war. General Scott was the man sent for that job.

The Great Pacificator, as he would be called, consulted with Washington on his mission. "Every branch of the Government felt alarmed at the imminent hazard of a formidable war," he recounts of his meeting with the Secretary of War. Scott, who had not slept in days, said to President Van Buren: "Mr. President, if you want war, I need only look on in silence. The Maine people will make it for you fast and hot enough. I know them; but if peace be your wish, I can give no assurance of success. The difficulties in its way will be formidable." "Peace with honor," Van Buren replied. Scott left on his mission "with a hearty good will."⁵⁶ He knew that he had *carte blanche* to prevent war; he also knew that, if he failed, the grisly business of war would also fall to him.⁵⁷

Upon his arrival in the Aroostook, the situation was so tense that the population of Maine hoped that he had come to conquer the Aroostook militarily. The crowds "had become tired of diplomacy, parleys, and delays". He could only pronounce the word peace "in the gentlest and most persuasive accents to the hostile ears of the Governor and his council at Augusta, the capital of Maine."⁵⁸ Judging that the parties were fast approaching actual hostilities, Scott quickly understood that Maine politics was the driver of war. Since the masses were calling for it, the ruling Democrats were bellicose, with the Whigs threatening to regain control of the state with their competing war talk. Fairfield could not appear weak. Scott worked on implementing the Fox-Forsyth memorandum.

Setting up an office in the Governor's house in Augusta, Scott sat with Fairfield and his advisers three times a day to persuade him to accept the terms of the memorandum. "By degrees he won their confidence," helped no doubt by his connection to the president.⁵⁹ Fairfield sympathised with

⁵⁴ Manning (1975: 65).

⁵⁵ Jones (1975: 533).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 334.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 535.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 336.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 338.

Scott, writing to his wife on 6 March that the general “is now the lion of the day. He is often at my rooms and I find him to be very agreeable.”⁶⁰ But Fairfield was also influenced by political supporters who decried the Fox-Forsyth memorandum as “a foul blot upon our nation”.⁶¹ Scott was of the opinion that President Van Buren had made a tactical mistake in releasing the Memorandum to Congress, as it inflamed passions.⁶² As he made slow progress in Maine, Scott worked simultaneously on persuading Sir Harvey, Governor of New Brunswick, to exercise restraint.

Scott struggled “to find a solvent for such knarled perplexities, foreign and domestic.” By a stroke of sheer luck, “accidental circumstances in his history” provided an opening.⁶³ It happened that Scott knew Harvey personally, having spared him from certain death on the battlefield. When one of Scott’s men took aim and fired at Harvey – who had a reputation for kindness towards American prisoners – Scott bumped his rifleman’s weapon, shouting “Don’t kill our prisoner!” This gave Harvey the time to escape unscathed. Serendipitously, Harvey – now Governor of New Brunswick – had since written a letter to Scott, which allowed them to maintain a crucial exchange throughout the crisis.⁶⁴ They had developed a personal bond of friendship and mutual respect. When Scott finally mediated a political agreement between Maine Whigs and Democrats, which reassured Fairfield that his opponents would not gain politically by tarring his peace gesture, the deal was done.⁶⁵ Sir Harvey agreed immediately to the outlines of Scott’s deal, which was basically a repetition of the Fox-Forsyth memorandum, without the political poison for Fairfield.

Trusting Scott, Harvey did not object on grounds of the unresolved details.⁶⁶ On March 12, Fairfield, no longer fearing a political threat from the Whigs, made a conciliatory speech. On 20 March, the Augusta Legislature passed an act echoing this statement.⁶⁷ Scott’s mission was bearing fruit, as both sides worked to find a way to dismantle the cycle of escalation. The next day, Scott sent a letter to Harvey in the format of ‘if you declare this, we’ll declare that.’ He asked Harvey to declare that, while awaiting instructions from London, he would not seek to expel Maine’s posse by military force. In exchange, Scott offered a reciprocal statement from Governor Fairfield that he would not seize the disputed territory militarily, leaving only a small posse to protect the timber.⁶⁸ A few days later, Harvey gave his full consent to Scott’s face-saving proposal, and Fairfield

⁶⁰ Staples (1922: 270).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 252.

⁶² Scott (1864: 340).

⁶³ *Ibid.* 342.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 342-343.

⁶⁵ “A feast is a great peacemaker—worth more than all the usual arts of diplomacy.” *Ibid.* 344-345.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 346.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 346.

⁶⁸ See the full wording at *Ibid.* 347-350.

followed suit.⁶⁹ Harvey was extremely pleased with Scott's effort, and thanked him for restoring relations to allow the peaceful resolution of the boundary dispute.⁷⁰ The immediate crisis was over.

ANALYSIS

The Aroostook War is one of the most extraordinary non-events in history. In the end, only two people died. One Maine soldier died of measles, and a farmer named Nathan Johnston was killed by a bullet ricocheting during a peace celebration.⁷¹ The great powers narrowly averted a head-on collision which, as one contemporary source estimated, would have cost the U.S. vastly more than the land was worth. The war could have cost \$5,000 a day, or millions of dollars a day in modern terms.⁷² Despite such enormous political pressure in favour of a military confrontation, none occurred. As one author wrote, "it can only be looked upon as a mystery, that under such circumstances, actual hostilities did not lead to bloodshed along the entire border."⁷³ Hindsight has made it evident that, far from a mystery, the purposive actions of decision-makers prevented war. The question we must ask is how, despite such pressure, the parties were able to prevent a war which, as Fairfield wrote to his wife, he considered inevitable? To answer this question, we must begin with Fairfield himself.

Evidently, the dynamics of escalation in this crisis were driven by all the major players. However, historians of the Aroostook War appear to concur that the state of Maine – or, more precisely, Governor Fairfield – was in the driver's seat of the push for war. Although Harvey immediately supported it, Fairfield initially refused to negotiate a compromise on the basis of the Fox-Forsyth memorandum.⁷⁴ On 27 February, at the height of the crisis, Fairfield was not only furious at the lack of instructions from Washington and ready to take matters into his own hands; he had also, dangerously, convinced himself that events were beyond his control.⁷⁵ By 9 March, however, Fairfield had changed his tune. He now expressed the hope that, using the Fox-Forsyth memorandum, "I shall be able to take a course which shall preserve our honor and yet not unnecessarily provoke hostilities."⁷⁶ Over those ten days, Fairfield changed his mind, paving the way for the dispute's peaceful de-escalation. His change of mind is one of the enduring elements of this crisis.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 350-351.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 351.

⁷¹ Jones (1975: 308-309).

⁷² Lowenthal (1951: 325).

⁷³ Elli (1894: 33).

⁷⁴ Duckett (2010: 207).

⁷⁵ Even as he pushed for war and revelled in militaristic speeches to his troops, he did not view his actions as driving the conflict, but transferred that agency and moral responsibility to God: "Events are in the hands of a Wise and Good being, and with his orderings, I will endeavour to be content." In Staples (1922: 269).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 271.

There are two theories of Fairfield's character and role in the crisis. The first is the critique, from several Whig opponents, that Fairfield was simply "a hot-headed fanatic who was rushing the country into war."⁷⁷ This was a superficial and politically-motivated argument. In truth, even the Whigs pushed for war, with one partisan paper writing: "There is no good reason why we should avoid a collision. We have avoided it too much and too long already."⁷⁸ Lowenthal proposes the alternative theory that President Van Buren's even-handed public statement worsened the crisis, by painting Fairfield into a corner, and making bellicosity his only hope of preventing war. Lowenthal argues that John Fairfield "was not a warlike man, and knew how ridiculous it was to suppose that Maine could fight England single-handed."⁷⁹ Lowenthal continues:

it was only by the most consummate skill that he was able to prevent [war]. Had he shown the slightest disposition to back out, the Legislature would have taken the matter out of his hands and precipitated an immediate conflict. Fairfield had to pretend to be belligerent, yet do nothing rash, and wait until the dispute should die down of its own accord. Had he followed any other course, he would have been committing political suicide.⁸⁰

Rather than Fairfield the fanatic, we have an image of Fairfield as the skilled peace-maker.⁸¹ This is an intriguing argument. But the entire theory rests on one letter Fairfield wrote to his wife, in which he hoped "soon to be able to beat the sword into the ploughshare and to go to work upon our humble farm."⁸² But a third possibility, which Jones mentions but underplays, is that General Scott truly saved the day. Indeed, Fairfield wrote his sword-to-ploughshare letter to his wife *six days after* his previous letter signalling his change of mind. Something occurred between 27 February, when Fairfield was ready to start a war, and 9 March, when he hoped for a face-saving way out. That *something* was General Scott's mission.

Scott's presence on the ground is the only explanation for why Fairfield changed his attitude, almost literally overnight, once "the lion of the day" had arrived in Maine. As Jones argues, both Whigs and Democrats had probably "finally understood where their policies had led the state and gladly took advantage of an opportunity to escape war."⁸³ It is probably not true that Fairfield was more concerned with preventing war than with surviving politically – or else he would not have escalated the crisis to the brink. General Scott is likely right in his view that, had he arrived in March a few days late, "the troops of the two countries would have arrived, and crossed bayonets on the disputed territory..."⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Lowenthal (1951: 325).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 330.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 330.

⁸¹ "Such a situation would have dismayed a less skilful man than Fairfield; certainly the easiest and most popular way out would have been to start fighting." *Ibid.* 331.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Jones (1975: 528).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 337.

In his memoirs, Scott's occasional self-importance is balanced by his realistic assessment that his prestige as the general of 1812 was the real source of his power to mediate the dispute so effectively.⁸⁵ It was perhaps not *what he said* which moved Fairfield, but *what he represented*: a general who had fought the last war, and who would lead young Mainers to their deaths if another one broke out. In the end, the decision *not* to go to war belongs squarely to Fairfield. He deserves the credit of accepting a mediated solution. Without Scott to help both sides save face, Fairfield's policy of putting Maine on a collision path with New Brunswick would likely have ended in war. The final border treaty was signed in 1842. But it was due to the collective efforts of Fox, Forsyth, Van Buren, Harvey, Fairfield and, finally, Scott, that history has not added the Anglo-American War of 1839 to the list of 'inevitable' wars.

CONCLUSION

The above case revealed important insights into agency, contingency and individualism, which we will return to in later chapters. In the first instance, I argued that Scott's mission helped to explain why no war occurred during this crisis. His agency was at the heart of the successful prevention of war in the Aroostook crisis. However, it is unclear how much causal power we can attribute to Scott's mediation, rather than to Fairfield's own change of mind. Secondly, the contingency of history was revealed, in this case, in the fact that Scott was able to rely on Governor Harvey's goodwill since he had saved his life during the British-American war of 1813. This element of pure chance appears to have been crucial in explaining the success of Scott's initiative to prevent war. Finally, the framework of methodological individualism provides a persuasive lens through which to study these micro-historical interactions. If we effaced all of these personalities, and zoomed up to the level of nation-states, we would lose sight of the local actors on the ground who were beyond the control of central governments – especially lumberjacks on both sides. A structuralist explanation of this crisis would not capture the irreducible role of individual people. We will return to some of these discussion points in the theory-building stage of this dissertation. For now, we remain in the U.S., where decades later General Scott is still playing a major role, this time in support of another leader trying to prevent a looming civil war.

⁸⁵ Even had he been an orator as persuasive as a Demosthenes, he writes, "his entreaties and harangues would have been wholly lost upon his hearers. But the memory of other days gave him an influence which he would have sought in vain without it." Scott (1864: 308-309).

William H. Seward – The Secession Crisis, 1860-1861

“Cheerful where everyone else was in despair...grand in resource where every resource seemed exhausted... between his friends who were ready to denounce him, and his enemies who were eager to destroy him ... [he] fought... a fight which might go down to history as one of the wonders of statesmanship.”
- Henry Adams¹

In the previous chapter, we followed General Scott’s efforts to prevent armed conflict between two great powers over a sliver of arable land. As I argued above, without the key actions of several leaders, especially Harvey and Fairfield, war would likely have occurred. In this chapter, we remain in North America, but now turn to events which led to the cataclysmic U.S. Civil War. I argue that the causes of this war are revealed fully at the individual level of analysis, where we can see some agents advocating for the use of force, and others acting strategically, and often desperately, to prevent it. One such agent was William Henry Seward. During the 1861 secession crisis, Seward mounted what Henry Adams called a wonder of statesmanship. “All the hyperbole and hero-worship aside,” Mark Stegmaier writes, “Henry Adams was probably not that inaccurate in his portrayal of the pivotal role” that Seward played.² The civil war, I will argue, did not occur necessarily, but due to the confluence of chance events, one leader’s stubborn will, and the actions of many individuals.

This case study focuses on the dramatic events of the winter of 1860-1861, which saw promising initiatives to prevent secession from dismembering the United States. Claiming over half a million lives, the U.S. Civil War presaged the industrial-scale destruction of twentieth century warfare.³ As this case study seeks to demonstrate, the civil war was anything but inevitable. In this section, I briefly survey the key events and actors in the secession crisis. Secondly, I examine William Henry Seward’s campaign to avert the collapse of the Union during the winter of 1860-1861. Thirdly, I turn to the pivotal Fort Sumter incident, which saw Seward’s conciliatory campaign lose out to the belligerent elements in his own party. Finally, I engage in the scholarly debate on responsibility for the outbreak of war. Following revisionist historians, I argue that William Henry Seward very nearly prevented the cataclysmic American civil war.

¹ Adams (1958: 23).

² Cited in Adams (2012: 219).

³ See Neely (1991: 5-28).

BACKGROUND

Tensions between the slave-owning South and the North reached their apex in 1860.⁴ The Missouri Compromise (1820) attempted to resolve the impasse by legalising slavery in the southern states. The *status quo* broke down following the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), which effectively repealed the 1820 compromise. In a sign of growing tensions, pro- and anti-slavery activists clashed violently in Kansas. The crisis split political parties into two blocs, Republicans and Democrats, which roughly held sway in the free North and the slave-holding South respectively.

Two particular incidents raised the stakes in this national schism. Firstly, in 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court, in one of the most controversial cases in its history, declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional.⁵ In 1859, a radical abolitionist, John Brown, attempted to launch a slave rebellion in the South. He was captured and executed; the North treated him as a martyr, the South as a criminal.⁶ By early 1860, the stage was set for a violent confrontation. But not all actors were resigned to accepting their parts in the macabre theatre to come. This chapter documents one particularly bold and almost fruitful attempt to prevent the conflict that became the American Civil War.

Until they reached the precipice, few observers at the time foresaw that disunion might lead to civil war. Those who did foresee it seemed unaware of how costly civil war would be.⁷ One such observer was Jefferson Davis, the future President of the Confederate States of America.⁸ Another was William Henry Seward, a neighbour and close friend of Davis in Washington, and Lincoln's secretary of state-designate.⁹ Lincoln himself appeared to be blind to the risk of war until late in the secession crisis.¹⁰ Other prominent actors who foresaw and attempted to prevent civil war included Douglas Adams, the Democratic presidential candidate whom Lincoln defeated in the November 1860 election, and senator John Crittenden. However, Seward became the *de facto* leader of those seeking compromise during the secession crisis. This case study therefore focuses on Seward's efforts to avoid civil war.

⁴ So-called because, as Thomas argues, the Northerners' opposition to slavery, including that of Lincoln himself, "often cloaked Negrophobia." Thomas (2011: 37).

⁵ Ashworth (2012: 149).

⁶ *Ibid.* 164.

⁷ One "rabble-rousing editor" of the *Charleston Mercury* was so confident of the bloodlessness of any conflict that he was quoted as saying that he would eat the corpses of all men slain during secession. Colonel Chesnut, who played a central role in the coming Fort Sumter incident, similarly announced that "I will drink all the blood shed in the war." The Confederate Secretary of War bragged that a handkerchief would soak up all the blood that would be spilled in the coming war." See Thomas (2011: 9-10).

⁸ *Ibid.* 60-61.

⁹ Thomas cites a speech by Seward on 22 December 1860 in which he dismissed the dangers of secession as "humbug" to a public audience as evidence that he was also in denial regarding the risk of war. However, this was an impromptu speech, in which "he exhibited his talent for screening his worries behind a curtain of nebulous rhetoric." Seward was worried by this stage, as we will see, as he foresaw the grim risk of civil war, and was already plotting to prevent it. *Ibid.* 44; Robinson (2013: 56).

¹⁰ See Thomas (2011: 40).

An elder and widely respected statesman across party lines, Seward was by far the favourite Republican tipped to run for President in 1860. The former New York governor was a political leviathan, backed by immense popular support and money from financial elites. Seward was a notable and early opponent of slavery.¹¹ He was a captivating orator, if at times slightly academic.¹² Karl Marx noted that Seward was “unquestionably” the Republicans’ “leading orator,” which he did not mean as a compliment.¹³ Seward was as adept as any 19th Century politician at vote-buying, a cruder version of modern lobbying.¹⁴ And he was self-important. If the Republicans did not nominate him for president, he told a reporter, he would quit public life in protest.¹⁵ With Seward’s great fame came great enmities.

His most eminent detractor was Horace Greeley, who claimed that Seward had abandoned him when he sought support for political office in 1855. Now editor of the *New York Tribune*, the most influential newspaper in the country, Greeley sought revenge.¹⁶ At the Republican convention in May 1860, he spread rumours about Seward’s radicalism.¹⁷ Greeley allied with Lincoln’s team on a “stop Seward” campaign and was elated when, against all odds, Lincoln clinched the nomination.¹⁸ It is important to stress Greeley’s role in undermining Seward’s ambitions, as he appears again at a most inauspicious moment in history.¹⁹

Despite his shattering and unexpected loss, Seward campaigned vigorously to the point of physical exhaustion for the Republicans in the November elections. At the start of the secession crisis, Seward was seen, and saw himself, as first among equals in any future Lincoln cabinet. When two South Carolina senators resigned their seats and threatened secession at the start of winter, Seward immediately saw the urgency of going to Washington.²⁰ From there, he would put into motion what one historian called “a coherent plan for ultimate peaceful reconstruction of the Union.”²¹ But for a few contingent events, Seward’s plan might have prevented imminent war, and ended slavery via non-violent means. As this case demonstrates, Lincoln obstructed these compromise proposals of Seward and numerous other conciliatory leaders. Seward, whose soiled

¹¹ Denton (2009: 37-38, 43-44).

¹² *Ibid.* 41, 48.

¹³ Among similar critiques, Marx mocked Seward’s “repulsive mixture of greatness of phrase and smallness of mind, of mimicry of strength and acts of weakness!” (Marx and Engels: 1961: 98-99)

¹⁴ Denton (2009: 39-40).

¹⁵ Taylor (1991: 116)

¹⁶ Seward was not above petty revenge after his defeat at the Chicago convention. See *Ibid.* 112 and 120.

¹⁷ Denton (2009: 14-15).

¹⁸ Denton points out the role of other contingent events which disadvantaged Seward’s nomination. The first ballot was put off for a day after the printer broke down, which Greeley and the Lincoln team used to their utmost to cut deals late into the night. The author recounts that “many delegates said afterwards that if the first ballot had been taken on May 17, as scheduled, Seward would have been nominated.” *Ibid.* 16.

¹⁹ As a biographer noted, delegates were unanimous on the effects of Greeley’s interventions. “No unkind word toward Mr. Seward escaped him... Nevertheless, he was killing Seward all the time...” See Ingersoll (1974: 339), Greeley (1970: 390) and Taylor (1996: 5-7).

²⁰ Denton (2009: 62).

²¹ Cited in Robinson (2003: 34).

reputation has only recently been rehabilitated, very nearly saved the Union. The following section recounts the ebbs and flows in Seward's efforts from December 1860 to April 1861.

THE LONGEST WINTER

With the threat of southern secession growing, the New York stock market crashed. "Washington was in a state of near panic," Denton emphasises, "and no one knew the president-elect, or more important, what he intended to do."²² Lincoln was an obscure and inexperienced politician from Illinois. He later freely admitted that he had expected to be *Seward's* right-hand man, not the other way around.²³ The President-Elect remained in Illinois for now. Seward was quietly active in Washington, manoeuvring quietly to gauge the views of southern leaders.²⁴ In a December 2 letter to his manager, Seward predicted the secession of many southern states.²⁵ As the secession winter commenced, two main factions pushed for a compromise: Northern moderates who condemned rigid abolitionists, and Southern moderates who sought reconciliation.²⁶ Seward's strategy aimed to weld together this cross-party movement, to empower moderates and isolate radicals both North and South.

In conducting his plan to find a political compromise, Seward employed his manager, Thurlow Weed, as a proxy. Weed wrote op-eds in his *Albany Evening Journal* floating various proposals, which would help Seward gauge political reactions to them.²⁷ On 20 December, South Carolina finally seceded. Lincoln still resisted the need to for any compromise. Following the first secession, the Washington rumour mill warned of a secessionist plot to seize the capital city in late December. Seward clung to the hope that suggesting "a convention two years hence" may buy time for peace.²⁸ By this stage, Seward's observations in Washington had evolved into a "three-pronged approach" to prevent disunion and, worse, civil war. Firstly, he would seek to push for a compromise acceptable to pro-Union activists in upper southern states, to split those key states from the more hard-line secessionists in the deep South.²⁹ Secondly, he would seek to fuel support for a compromise in the North. Finally, his pivotal third objective was to gain time to restore southern trust in the Union.³⁰ Time was not on his side. By late December, moderate Republicans could foresee that a lack of compromise might spell war.³¹

²² Denton (2009: 63).

²³ "If I had the making of the President," Lincoln told a judge in May 1860, "I would make Seward President." *Ibid.* 61.

²⁴ Taylor (1996: 134-148).

²⁵ Denton (2009: 63).

²⁶ *Ibid.* 64.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 70.

²⁹ See Wilson (1971: 533-556).

³⁰ Denton (2009: 69).

³¹ *Ibid.* 70.

The majority of public opinion, North and South, was overwhelmingly in favour of peace. Hundreds of moderate politicians, elites and ordinary citizens from across the country sent letters supporting the peace efforts of Seward, Crittenden and Douglas. Seward redirected these pro-compromise petitions to Lincoln, to try to influence his views.³² Lincoln not only resisted but actively ordered his allies to resist any compromise proposals. An incident on 9 January 1861 presaged things to come. Buchanan had ordered a ship, *The Star of the West*, to resupply the federal Fort Sumter in South Carolina.³³ The mission was a major failure; the ship withdrew after South Carolinians fired upon it. Mississippi seceded on that day, as did Florida the next, and Alabama soon thereafter. Senator Crittenden attempted to bypass opponents of compromise by appealing directly to the people in a referendum on his proposal, but Lincoln vetoed the idea.³⁴ Speaking before a packed senate on 12 January, Seward preached peace, conciliation and devotion to the Union before all else. Lincoln privately endorsed Seward's speech as "doing good all over the country."³⁵ As long as the conciliators prevailed, nothing seemed inevitable about further secession, let alone war.

In February, the last month of the secession winter, Virginia invited all states to attend a 'Peace Conference' to attempt to negotiate a compromise solution. Although historians are still debating whether Seward was behind this initiative, his influence was clearly not far away.³⁶ Weed, Seward's manager, convinced Lincoln that Republicans should attend.³⁷ Lincoln claimed that he "would rather be hung by the neck til he was dead on the steps of the Capitol, rather than begging for peace," but finally relented to moderate Republicans.³⁸ Greeley attempted to undermine the conference with his *Tribune* mouthpiece, urging "NO MORE COMPROMISES!" He equated attempts to broker peace with treason.³⁹ The Peace Conference recommended any "constitutional method" to "permanently settle the question of slavery."⁴⁰ But a powerful coalition of Northern and Southern radicals hoped that the conference would collapse.⁴¹ They successfully joined forces in both houses of Congress to defeat a motion even to discuss these propositions.⁴² The hawks had won. Despite the swelling tide of popular excitement at the prospects of compromise, the Peace Conference would be a sad footnote to history. Horace Greeley continued to use his powerful voice

³² *Ibid.* 73, 75, 85, 86.

³³ In December, President Buchanan had been informed by Major Anderson, who commanded Fort Sumter, that he was fast running out of supplies to hold the fort. Buchanan ordered a resupply mission. General Scott oversaw the bungled mission. At the last minute, he tried to recall the merchant ship, but it was too late. *Ibid.* 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 81.

³⁶ Gunderson (1958: 354) and Stahr (2012: 227-228).

³⁷ Gunderson (1958: 358).

³⁸ *Ibid.* 349.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 353.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 354.

⁴¹ Gunderson (1961: 9).

⁴² *Ibid.* 11-12.

in the press to practically advocate war: “NO NEGOTIATIONS WITH TRAITORS” his headlines shrieked. “Let this suspense and uncertainty cease! If we are to fight, so be it.”⁴³

A contemporary’s account of the peace conference is particularly telling in revealing the causes, or rather the personal vendettas, behind the conference’s failure:

The difficulty is certain men of [New York] are more interested in killing Seward, than in saving the Union – Indeed there is too general a feeling that party is paramount to Union – I fear that this feeling or rather the apprehension of injuring the party will lead to a policy which will destroy both it & the country...⁴⁴

In another letter to his brother, he wrote: “*Confidentially*, I would say a party is manifestly being formed here to head off Gov. Seward, not to drive him out of the Cabinet, but to forestall him for the future...”⁴⁵ This is intriguing. Some of Seward’s enemies from New York attended the conference not only to scuttle a peaceful compromise, but to scuttle his *career* and, perhaps, his chance of running for the presidency in 1864. This episode reveals that Seward’s name had become virtually synonymous with ‘compromise’ by February 1861. In destroying his compromise efforts, his enemies sought to destroy him personally.⁴⁶ It is unclear of whom exactly this “strong Anti-Seward party” consisted.⁴⁷ But Greeley, a fellow New Yorker, is a likely member. Seward increasingly saw Greeley and radical Republicans as enemies of peace. But Seward himself made a move which appears, in hindsight, to have been a major mistake. When faced with an intransigent Lincoln and Republicans united in their rejection of the Peace Conference, Seward toed the line rather than risk his position. Many moderate Southerners, who were depending on Seward to keep the doors of compromise open, saw this as a betrayal.⁴⁸

In Lincoln’s absence, “[General] Scott and [Seward] rule the country and Scott’s share in the rule is but small.”⁴⁹ Another historian characterised Seward as “the most powerful person in Washington” from December 1860-January 1861.⁵⁰ With Lincoln’s arrival in February, however, Seward’s influence waned overnight. When Lincoln was inaugurated on 13 February, Seward worked with Scott and numerous agents to ensure that soldiers guarded every potential vantage point to protect Lincoln from credible assassination plots.⁵¹ On 24 February, Seward wrote a letter to the president warning him to revise his inauguration speech, which virtually guaranteed the secession of wavering southern states.⁵² The original text featured provocative fighting talk, putting

⁴³ *Ibid.* 12.

⁴⁴ Cited in Gunderon (1861: 387).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 388.

⁴⁶ Denton (2009: 90).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 389.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 105; 112.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 90.

⁵⁰ Taylor (1991: 159).

⁵¹ Scott ordered military precautions to protect the capital as early as December 1860. See Stone (1887: 9, 21-25).

⁵² Denton (2009: 104).

the onus on the South to avoid civil war.⁵³ Seward succeeded in persuading Lincoln to remove this tacit declaration of war.⁵⁴ Aside from this tactical victory, Lincoln's inauguration was a "pitiable failure," according to one guest, with rumours swirling of an impending attack by southern secessionists on the city.⁵⁵ In a sign of Seward's declining fortune, Lincoln appeased the hawks by promoting known hardliners to his cabinet.⁵⁶ Seward's strategy was losing ground by late February.

The following section focusses narrowly on Lincoln's decision to resupply Fort Sumter, and Seward's attempts to influence and undermine that decision by any means necessary. "The ordinary eye could not quite follow all that Secretary Seward was doing" in these last days of peace, one historian noted. What is clear is that he used "downright subterranean" methods.⁵⁷ In these final weeks of the crisis, human agency comes to the fore. The Fort Sumter crisis is, to paraphrase General Scott, one of those historical incidents which dramatically illustrate how much depends on individual people. General Scott himself, Seward and the German ambassador all attempted, in those final weeks, to prevent war. Their efforts were all blocked and rendered ineffective by the interventions of Lincoln himself. But even after Lincoln's decision brought the North and South to the brink of war, military officers still deliberated on a matter which determined the outcome of the crisis. An act of insubordination – a James Blunt moment – might have changed U.S. history.

THE FORT SUMTER INCIDENT

By March, Seward resorted to all available tactics to prevent impending civil war. For one, he attempted to negotiate directly with the Confederacy. He threatened Lincoln with resignation, in order to gain concessions to help southern Unionists fend off secessionism. Seward even gave orders to military officers which were perfectly unconstitutional.⁵⁸ General Scott was Seward's close collaborator in pushing for peaceful reconciliation. Scott warned Seward, *before* warning the President, that it was too dangerous to resupply Fort Sumter.⁵⁹ Major Anderson, the commanding officer in the fort, had written a report to Lincoln warning him that he could only last six more weeks. The same day, Greeley called on the White House to press Lincoln not to compromise. Many southern secessionists were praying for a clash with the U.S. army, which would almost certainly galvanise secessionism, and would puncture all moderate support for the Union.⁶⁰

In a cabinet meeting, Seward argued that the fort should be abandoned rather than resupplied. "The dispatch of an expedition to supply or reinforce Sumter," he predicted, would "provoke a civil

⁵³ See Stahr (2012: 239).

⁵⁴ Lincoln (1861).

⁵⁵ Cited in Croft (2010: 258).

⁵⁶ Denton (2009: 104).

⁵⁷ Catton (1966: 285).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 288.

⁵⁹ Denton (2009: 115).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 118, 121.

war”.⁶¹ Lincoln appeared to agree, but deferred his decision. General Scott had drafted an order to abandon Fort Sumter, awaiting Lincoln’s signature. Meanwhile, Greeley kept up the pressure on the president. When the hawks began swaying Lincoln to resupply the fort, Major Anderson himself (the officer in the fort) advised against it.⁶² The see-sawing deliberations in Lincoln’s cabinet came to a head when General Scott (acting in concert with Seward⁶³) wrote a report advocating the abandonment of Fort Sumter. The political nature of the general’s frank recommendation incensed Lincoln. Scott justified a withdrawal in order to “soothe and give confidence to the eight remaining slave-holding States, and render their cordial adherence to this Union perpetual.”⁶⁴ As Denton recounts:

Lincoln, truly worn out with his nerves near the breaking point, exploded in rage at reading the message, lashing out at the [80 year] old general and shouting that he would find someone else to lead the military if Scott would not follow orders. Scott, truly shaken by Lincoln’s violent reaction, asked to be excused from the dinner party and left.⁶⁵

With his cabinet split, ignoring the advice of military officers, and conceding to the hawks in his party, Lincoln finally ordered the expedition to Fort Sumter. Greeley played a crucial role in influencing this fateful decision through his meetings with Lincoln, in his widely-read *Tribune* articles, and his defamation of Seward and fellow compromisers. While we should not exaggerate his role, it is worth recalling that Greeley’s “diabolical hatred of Seward” drove his personal vendetta against Seward’s peace efforts.⁶⁶ Greeley had achieved his goal of dashing Seward’s ambitions, come hell or high water. And both would soon come.

The scene was set for a clash. But even now, events did not inexorably lead to war. Many other plausible courses of actions were still open. A large flotilla, including warships, left New York harbour headed for Fort Sumter, and was scheduled to arrive on April 15. Seward had successfully worked with his New York friends to delay the departure of the ships, going so far as to trick Lincoln into signing secret orders to poach one of the flagships for another mission.⁶⁷ As the naval officers deciphered their conflicting orders, Seward bought time to arrange last-ditch meetings between the president and Virginian pro-Union leaders. In one such meeting, the Virginian delegation proposed a three-part deal:

1. The federal government would promise not to use force against the South;
2. The South would promise not to seek foreign recognition; and
3. Both sides would organise a national convention to devise terms for the peaceful reunion of North and South.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Taylor (1991: 154).

⁶² Denton (2009: 129, 132).

⁶³ Stahr (2012: 267).

⁶⁴ Denton (2009: 143).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 135.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 137-138.

⁶⁷ Seward went so far as to secretly appropriate \$10,000 to fund this covert mission. *Ibid.* 145-146; Stahr (2012: 274).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 148.

Lincoln refused to promise the first point: not to attack the Confederacy. Seward negotiated indirectly with the unrecognised diplomatic representatives of the South, hoping to stall for time. He desperately gave assurances, behind Lincoln's back, that Fort Sumter would not be reinforced.⁶⁹ But in the end, Seward's efforts could not overcome Lincoln's steel will not to compromise. Seward flatly told the Virginian envoy, after his failed meeting with Lincoln, that "the days of philosophic statesmanship [were] about to give way to the mailed glove of the warrior."⁷⁰ Up to this point, Henry Seward "almost single-handedly, had kept the nation from war".⁷¹ Even after fighting had begun, Seward attempted to broker a cease-fire deal by encouraging the German ambassador to the U.S., Rudolf Schleiden, to negotiate a ceasefire. But this mission, too, finally failed when Lincoln suspended it.⁷²

One final anecdote reveals the innate contingency of history. Even with Lincoln's warships on the way to Fort Sumter, the Confederate troops preparing to level the fort to the ground, and Seward's numerous peace efforts having failed, war was still not inevitable. Between lit matches and incoming ships, as General Scott observed in 1837, were individuals. And events hinged upon their actions alone. Around 1am on 11 April, Confederate representatives, hearing of the impending resupply mission, presented federal soldiers with an ultimatum to surrender.⁷³ The resupply mission was due to arrive in a couple of days. Major Anderson, who had advised Lincoln against the ill-fated mission, refused to surrender. But, Anderson suggested, he and his men would likely be "starved out" within a few days anyway. When the Confederate officer, Colonel Chesnut, asked when this was likely to be, Anderson gathered his men and deliberated for two long hours in a gun chamber. There is no record of what they said during their meeting. When he emerged, Anderson told Chesnut that he would be "starved out" at noon on April 15. All sides knew the resupply mission would have arrived by then. Anderson had bluffed, and lost. It is entirely feasible, and historically possible, that he could have responded "tomorrow at noon". There is no telling how history would have changed. However, Anderson did not say those three words. Chesnut gave the order to fire on Fort Sumter one hour later – the first volley of the civil war.

ANALYSIS

As the above case study has demonstrated, Henry Seward's plan to save the Union represented a resourceful, popular and powerful initiative to prevent civil war. The above narrative, necessarily

⁶⁹ Taylor (1991: 148-149).

⁷⁰ Stahr (2012: 275-276).

⁷¹ For a fuller account of the German ambassador's ceasefire mission, see Lutz (1917: 207-216).

⁷² Deussen (1967: 286-287).

⁷³ Denton (2009: 166).

abridged, captures an array of junctures at which decision-makers could have changed history by signing a piece of paper, or simply remaining silent. The above case, I argue, dramatically reveals the contingency of history and the crucial role of human agency in determining the outbreak of war – and the failure of efforts to prevent it. In this section, I argue that the individual level of analysis provides the most coherent account of the causes of the U.S. Civil War. To begin, I will review two foreseeable critiques – one philosophical and one moral.

The first critique proceeds from a structural-deterministic reading of history. The actors seemed “to sleepwalk through the plot of a melodrama,” to use Emory Thomas’ analogy.⁷⁴ They all “stepped up to their marks and delivered their lines as they were supposed to do.”⁷⁵ This account runs in direct opposition to an agent-centric view of history, pinning responsibility for the war on individuals who chose force over compromise.⁷⁶ Structuralist theorists argue that the actors were enslaved by their conflicting principles, beliefs, economic systems and worldviews.⁷⁷ Implicit in this approach is the determinist idea that these factors made war inevitable.⁷⁸ This theory absolves the decision-makers of responsibility, shifting the blame for war to impersonal factors. Another historian agrees that leaders’ errors were fundamentally “structured by the social, political and economic conditions from which they sprang.”⁷⁹

The explanation does not pass the counter-factual test of answering why the war broke out in April 1861. If it was inevitable, why did it not occur following the Bloody Kansas incidents of the 1850s? A deterministic account can provide no satisfactory answer beyond blaming Republican ideology, or Slave Power, or racialism, or any other abstraction. An early historian of the civil war refuted this structural-deterministic theory. “One of the most colossal of misconceptions,” J. G. Randall concluded, “is the theory that fundamental motives produce war.”⁸⁰ As Thomas convincingly retorts, if the “conflicting visions of the world lay at the base of the conflict that produced the war,” those visions did not ultimately cause the war:

the world has always been full of peoples who profess ideological conflict with other peoples. Sometimes they go to war with each other; most times they choose to live in peace, albeit often an uneasy one. The important question about Northern and Southern Americans in 1861, therefore, is why they *elected* to fight. What drove them past posing, posturing, and politics into armed conflict?⁸¹

The structuralist approach spares historians the divisive task of apportioning blame and credit. But a structural perspective can also bring an all-important nuance to Thomas’ argument above. One

⁷⁴ Thomas (2011: 89-90).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ See, for example, *Ibid.* ix.

⁷⁷ See for example, Ashworth (2012: 150-151).

⁷⁸ Ashworth, for example, argues that impersonal factors were largely to blame for the war. *Ibid.* 150-151.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 152.

⁸⁰ Cited in Geyl (1955: 296).

⁸¹ See Thomas (2011: 5).

historian brings a dose of methodological humility to any argument that contemporary leaders, such as Lincoln, consciously *chose* war in a straightforward sense. David Potter warned that participants in historical events “tend to see the alternatives in that situation as less clear, less sharply focused” than scholars. Hindsight allows us to impose analytical clarity and simplicity on the chaos of events, and “to see the alternatives as more clear, more evident, more sharply focused than they really were.”⁸² Potter concludes on a striking note:

When men choose a course of action which had a given result, historians will tend to attribute to them not only the choice of the course, but even the choice of the result... Whatever choice anyone exercised in 1860-1861, no one chose the American Civil War, because it lay behind the veil of the future; it did not exist as a choice.⁸³

This conclusion provides a strong counter to an agent-centric explanation of the U.S. Civil War. It nuances the above argument that American leaders simply *chose* war in 1861. Potter argues that hindsight allows us “to define the alternatives in the deceptively clear terms of later events,” and holds up agents’ actions in light of that hindsight.⁸⁴ I will return to this insight in a future theoretical discussion,⁸⁵ since it introduces a useful nuance to any agent-centric theory of preventive diplomacy. This argument leads us to an important concession to structuralist theories of war, namely that agents may determine their own choices, but not the *consequences* of those choices.

There is a third objection to the argument that the U.S. Civil War was preventable. Even if it *could* have been prevented with some sort of North-South compromise, some might retort on moral grounds, Lincoln was right not to compromise on slavery. Although Seward sought peace as a greater good, Lincoln was at least faithful to his abolitionist principles. To modern eyes, the Crittenden Compromise is a morally reprehensible text, effectively granting slavery constitutional recognition, and extending the practice territorially. From this viewpoint, those who advocated a compromise on slavery – sacrificing moral principles to avoid war – were no better than twentieth century appeasers. Slavery was an absolute evil, and ending this evil justified as much blood as was necessary to achieve that noble end. If half a million graves were necessary, so be it.⁸⁶ In other words, it was a *just* war.

There are logical problems with this argument. Firstly, this critique fallaciously assumes that armed conflict is necessary to end slavery, which is simply not the case, as the experience of Britain demonstrated. Secondly, this argument assumes that the secession crisis represented a black-and-

⁸² Potter (1972: 307-308).

⁸³ *Ibid.* 308.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ See Chapter 8.

⁸⁶ It should be noted, for balance, that an ideological aversion to compromise was equally strong, if not moreso, on the Southern side. Thomas (2011: 12), Taylor (1991: 121).

white choice between good and evil. Reality was much greyer.⁸⁷ One of Lincoln's biographers observed that he "always regarded the perpetuation of the Union as more important than the abolition of slavery."⁸⁸ This moralistic critique assumes that Lincoln risked war to free the slaves, rather than to suppress a rebellion. Although he evidently abhorred slavery,⁸⁹ his emancipation of the slaves was a by-product of war, not its root cause.

Finally, this critique tars Seward for compromising on slavery. In actual fact, Seward was an early and radical abolitionist.⁹⁰ He later drifted to a more centrist position, seeing the preservation of the Union as the first priority. Seward, the pragmatist, was willing to be flexible to prevent war. Lincoln, the principled president, was unwilling to budge for any compromise. Seward did not intend to bury slavery under the carpet. In exchange for a short-term compromise, his intention was to seek the peaceful abolition of slavery, rather than by force of arms.⁹¹ However, Seward also made critical errors during his efforts to prevent war. To avoid painting a hagiographic portrait of Seward, we must explore these in more depth.

Firstly, numerous sources have corroborated that, during this crisis, Seward attempted to be all things to all men.⁹² This led him "down a path of double talk that increasingly painted him into a corner," as Michael Robinson notes.⁹³ At times he "told some Republicans he disdained the notion of compromise while he assured others that he would do anything to conciliate the South."⁹⁴ His mixed signals were sharpened by his indiscretion; he spoke too much after a few drinks.⁹⁵ These tactical missteps complicated Seward's mission.⁹⁶ It is no wonder that contemporaries thought that "Mr. Seward is one of the most perplexing men alive,"⁹⁷ and had "more faces than Janus."⁹⁸ One historian called him "an infatuated power seeker" who deceived himself as much as others about the prospects of peace.⁹⁹ Tellingly, the only time Seward lost his temper during the crisis was when people sought to pin him down on a specific proposal.¹⁰⁰ Seward's contrived optimism also made it

⁸⁷ Revisionist historians have argued that the primary *casus belli* of the war was not actually slavery – which was more of a propaganda tool – but secessionism itself. See Fellman, Gordon and Sutherland (2007).

⁸⁸ David Potter, cited in Frederickson (2008: 85).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 86.

⁹⁰ Historians generally agree that Seward was much more flexible than his radical abolitionist rhetoric suggested. See Wilson (1971: 536) and Taylor (1991: 122).

⁹¹ Wilson (1971: 533-556).

⁹² Stahr (2012: 230).

⁹³ Robinson (2013: 65).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Deussen (1967: 249).

⁹⁶ Taylor (1991: 149-150).

⁹⁷ Cited in Croft (2010: 259).

⁹⁸ Cited in Stegmaier (2012: 118).

⁹⁹ Catton (1966: 290-291).

¹⁰⁰ Seward "obviously wished to remain flexible as to adjustment plans and did not wish to tie himself to any particular proposal," one observer noted. Cited in Stegmaier (2012: 170).

increasingly difficult to discern Seward's real views.¹⁰¹ This tactic of public ambiguity only alienated his supporters.

By denying that he sought compromise, Seward appeared to betray the cause he served.¹⁰² His December vote against the Crittenden proposal in the Senate is a case in point.¹⁰³ To any northern or southern observer, he was toeing the party line of 'no compromises'. Similarly, his January speech appears to have been another lost opportunity. Although he preached in favour of the Union and peace, Seward failed to make any concrete compromises to avoid splitting his party. One reporter judged that Seward, despite hoping for compromise, "cannot arrive at the magnanimity of proposing it himself, lest he offend his party. He fails in the quality of the statesman, while he indulges in the vanity of the rhetorician."¹⁰⁴ Compromise advocate Crittenden was bitterly disappointed that Seward failed to propose anything novel.¹⁰⁵ To those who knew of his peace efforts, he appeared weak-willed and submissive to his party.¹⁰⁶ Yet others, like his own wife, saw his speech as too conciliatory.¹⁰⁷ Finally, in publicly rejecting the proposals of the Peace Conference – for no other reason, it seems, than to save his career – Seward missed a chance to change the course of the crisis.¹⁰⁸

The guardians of posterity, in general, have been unfair to Seward.¹⁰⁹ Many historians have argued that Seward was intent solely on surviving politically.¹¹⁰ His conduct sometimes hints at self-serving motives.¹¹¹ However, this critique overlooks the fact, which Seward himself knew, that his political fate was tied up with that of the nation.¹¹² In 1861, Seward was objectively *the most influential serving official* pushing for peace. He understood that to publicise his plan risked crucifying his opportunity to influence events.¹¹³ Instead, he pushed for peace at immense political cost. The unflattering portraits of Seward originated in the bitter memoirs of his political enemies, who made him appear bellicose and power-hungry.¹¹⁴ Numerous historians uncritically repeated

¹⁰¹ Taylor (1991: 145).

¹⁰² One historian even concluded that Seward "felt compromise was not the answer..." (Deusen 1967: 239).

¹⁰³ Robinson (2013: 58).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Stegmaier (2012: 115, 121).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 63; see Stahr (2012: 224-225).

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Stegmaier (2012: 115, 121).

¹⁰⁸ One delegation presented Seward with a petition signed by 40,000 New Yorkers pressing for peace. The wealthy New Yorkers asked him to openly support their petition; Seward answered that he could not risk his political career. Stahr (2012: 231-232) and Stegmaier (2012: 178).

¹⁰⁹ John Taylor writes that this is due to the fact that some historians felt it "necessary to denigrate Seward in order to build up Lincoln." Taylor (1996: ix).

¹¹⁰ Stegmaier (2012: 34).

¹¹¹ Stahr (2012: 265).

¹¹² *Ibid.* 37.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 55.

¹¹⁴ Ferris (1991: 21-42).

these political character assassinations, which left “Seward’s historical reputation in shambles.”¹¹⁵ Whatever his failures as a politician, William Henry Seward had the merit of attempting to prevent war, at immense cost to his political fortunes. Had Seward been opportunistic and unprincipled, he would simply have called for military action from the start of the crisis.¹¹⁶

In another convincing critique, Taylor points to three weaknesses in Seward’s judgment: “his apparent belief that if peace were preserved over the short term, the seven states of the lower South would see the error of their ways and somehow drift back” and his “overvaluation of Unionist sentiment in the border states”. His southern allies proved to be “weak reeds” in the end.¹¹⁷ These are sound counter-arguments, but they come with the benefit of hindsight. As Taylor concedes, Seward was improvising, responding to a fast-paced crisis, not knowing how it would end.¹¹⁸ To weigh these critiques, we must ask whether Seward and Lincoln could have feasibly prevented the recourse to war by adopting a different course of action. A fair counter-factual test must choose an antecedent as close to the outbreak of war (early 1861) as possible. It would be too simple to argue that, had Seward won the Republican nomination (as he almost did), and carried the presidency (as he almost surely would have), he would have made a decisive difference in Lincoln’s role. That much is clear. Instead, I make the counter-factual argument, below, that Lincoln could still have avoided war in March 1861 by heeding Seward’s advice.

During Lincoln’s 4 March 1861 inauguration, soldiers were posted everywhere, on Seward’s and Scott’s orders, to guard every conceivable vantage point for would-be assassins. The Seward-Scott tandem had warned of Lincoln of credible assassination plots. Some plotters allegedly intended to blow up the platform on which Lincoln was due to speak. In response, soldiers were stationed underneath the platform to shoot any intruders. Since at least January, a worried Scott had told a military officer: “We are now in such a state that a dog-fight might cause the gutters of the capital to run with blood.”¹¹⁹ That same officer later recounted that he “firmly believe[d] that without [troops at the ready] Mr. Lincoln would never have been inaugurated. I believe that...he would have been killed, and that we should have found ourselves engaged in a struggle, without preparation, and without a recognized head of the capital.”¹²⁰ Other officers also speculated that Lincoln would be killed before being taking the oath of office.

¹¹⁵ This critique centres on an alleged plot, developed in a letter to Lincoln, to provoke a war with Britain or France in order to distract the American public. In hindsight, more balanced historians have granted that, not only has this document been distorted to slander Seward, but Lincoln practically implemented all of Seward’s policy recommendations, which helped to avert foreign intervention in the civil war. Letters from the diplomatic corps in Washington confirm that Seward did at least ponder the scenario of foreign intervention, uniting North and South against a common threat. See Ferris (1991), Taylor (1996: ix, 150-153) and Stahr (2012: 233, 269-273).

¹¹⁶ Taylor (1991: 161).

¹¹⁷ Taylor (1991: 159).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Stone (1887: 13).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 21.

A deafening thunder punctuates Lincoln's speech. In the din and confusion, the screaming crowd scatters, and Lincoln falls and is carried away by soldiers. He is not wounded. A nervous soldier, below the platform may have accidentally fired his musket; no suspected assassins are found. But several audience members were killed during the mass panic, trampled to death. This panic amplifies posturing in the North and South, but ultimately catalyses no immediate bloodshed. Lincoln, now steeped in melancholy,¹²¹ may have had his certainties shaken. A superstitious Lincoln may have even attributed oracular meaning to this event, as he did to dreams.¹²² Seward – whose “shrewd diplomatic quality” his critics recognised¹²³ – would have exploited the moment. He could have used the analogy of the stampede to impress upon Lincoln that military posturing against the South could bring about the war it was intended to deter. “To err is human,” Seward could have said, quoting Alexander Pope. “We must avoid fatal errors at Fort Sumter.”

In this scenario, let us assume that Lincoln was moved by the shock of the stampede and the force of Seward's arguments to do as Seward subsequently suggested in Cabinet, and as he promised to Confederate representatives: withdrawal from Fort Sumter, and a reinforcement of Fort Pickens, which was in a much stronger position off Florida. This good faith measure would have certainly angered northern Unionists and abolitionists, who would have called it appeasement. Southern hardliners would not have been impressed. But this concession may have sufficiently bolstered pro-Union allies in bordering southern states, such as Virginia, to resist the hardliners' push for war. In exchange, Lincoln could have requested – or *suggested*, to avoid recognising the sovereignty of the Confederacy – a conference in Virginia, inviting moderate statesmen, such as Jefferson Davis, and attendees of the earlier peace conference. Heated debates could have focussed on Virginian envoys' April 1861 proposal. In exchange for not seeking foreign recognition and both sides agreeing to freeze any military action, excluding mobilisation, for three months, the Virginia conference could have prepared proposals for future reunification based on constitutional amendments.

There can be no guarantee that this conference would have prevented war. Popular emotions, North and South, may simply have been too powerful and antagonistic to compromise.¹²⁴ The inauguration stampede could just as feasibly have tilted the capital into violent skirmishes, as Confederate partisans had not yet left *en masse*. In sum, *this* incident could have become the first battle in the war, rather than the Fort Sumter incident. More plausibly yet, the Virginia conference may simply have broken down into acrimonious and self-righteous posturing, simply prolonging the

¹²¹ Shenk (2006).

¹²² Barton (2005: 233-236).

¹²³ Welles (1874: 185).

¹²⁴ Geyl (1955: 296-300).

unstable peace by several weeks or months. War, a second-order counterfactual argument suggests, would have come anyway, triggered by some other incident of history.

But had Lincoln simply kept the Union in a defensive posture for a few more months, *without* the provocative move at Fort Sumter, events may have taken a very different course. For one, pro-Union and pacifist actors in the bordering states, though weak, may have been given more oxygen to breathe and even thrive, which was sucked away by the war frenzy following Fort Sumter. Moderate Southerners would have provided a strong, attractive alternative view of southern interests at the Virginia conference, and a less bellicose southern face. Their productive proposals would have been reported by every newspaper in the nation. Lincoln's own abolitionist political base may have shrunk in anger at his compromise, but the influential northern base in favour of reconciliation (Seward's allies) would have rallied to his support. In short, the Virginia conference, had it simply existed, may have irrevocably split and weakened hardline factions both South *and* North.

While we can never know the practical result of such a trend, let alone whether war would have been avoided, there is no doubt that this dynamic would have shifted the direction of the crisis. Any armed clash, on these terms, would have been by a minority of extremists against a sizeable, nationwide pro-peace coalition. Hardline abolitionists and hardline secessionists would *almost certainly* have attempted to catalyse a clash by means of a symbolic attack somewhere in their borderlands, perhaps in Kansas or even on the Virginia conference itself. Such an attack, even if successful, would have been one against *peace itself*, rather than against a monolithic North or South. And this may have made all the difference in history. Perhaps Virginia, North Carolina and other border states may not have immediately seceded, as violent secessionists fought against moderate Southerners. Conceding, as we may, that *some* form of violent conflict was still likely to occur, its dynamics would have fundamentally changed. A secessionist insurgency in Virginia, backed by the South, may have turned this conflict into a drawn-out proxy war for the borderlands. This would have changed American history. Whatever may have occurred, the American civil war, as we know it, was not inevitably bound to occur as and when it did.

As one of the most prominent voices in favour of compromise, Seward understood more than most the above political dynamics. "Mad men North, and mad men South, are working together to produce dissolution of the Union, by civil war," as he saw it.¹²⁵ Upon accepting Lincoln's offer to join his cabinet, Seward wrote to his wife: "It is inevitable. I will try to save freedom and my country."¹²⁶ Although he failed, Seward does not deserve the litany of attacks he has since attracted for seeking a compromise to save the Union. As he himself wrote in February 1861:

¹²⁵ Cited in Stahr (2012: 226).

¹²⁶ Cited in Robinson (2013: 59).

Twelve years ago freedom was in danger and the Union was not. I spake then so singly for freedom that short-sighted men inferred that I was disloyal to the Union... Today, practically, freedom is not in danger, and [the] Union is... I speak singly for the Union... [and] am now suspected of infidelity to freedom. In this case, as in the other, I refer myself not to the men of my time, but to the judgment of history.¹²⁷

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored William Henry Seward's efforts to save the Union during the secession crisis of 1860-1861 and, by doing so, to avert a fratricidal civil war. I argued firstly that Seward pursued a coherent and often desperate campaign to prevent war during the crisis. Secondly, I put forward a counter-factual argument that, despite the pull of events, Lincoln could have prevented war at numerous points. The American civil war was not necessary; neither a deterministic account of history, nor a moral absolutist case for the abolition of slavery through war stand up to scrutiny. Finally, I have argued that Seward does not merit the scorn of his political enemies, which has been echoed uncritically by numerous historians.

This case study has revealed fascinating evidence that individuals play a central role in the success or failure of efforts to prevent war. For one, this case demonstrated that personality politics and careerism can impede the most promising efforts to prevent war. Horace Greeley's role stands out as a great influence in undermining Seward's peace efforts at crucial turns. But Seward's own refusal to make a specific compromise proposal also partly reflected his careerist concerns. This, I suggest, means that the causes of the civil war cannot be adequately explained by accounts which omit the role of individuals. The civil war was ultimately not inevitable, as neither ideology nor other structural forces rendered it inevitable. The secession crisis culminated in war due to the purposive actions of individuals: including, most dramatically, the deliberation of a handful of soldiers at Fort Sumter.

A final sobering conclusion from this case is that those pushing for compromise over force are likely to endure the hatred not only of their contemporary enemies, but of posterity. Proponents of war, in contrast, are often absolved by impersonal accounts of history which take the responsibility for war out of their hands. We now turn to another case in history which confirms this insight. The July 1914 crisis is famous for the numerous deterministic accounts which many scholars and statesmen alike have encouraged. I aim to demonstrate that the First World War was causally determined not by any structural drivers of war, but by the complex web of actions and reactions of individual agents and contingent events. The two agents we will focus on are the two most prominent leaders – both largely forgotten – who attempted to delay or prevent the use of force in

¹²⁷ Cited in Taylor (1996: 159).

July 1914. I will argue that, had either of these agents acted differently, the war would likely not have occurred.

Count Tisza and Sir Edward Grey – The July Crisis, 1914

“Should he have persisted in his opposition, the World War, even if not avoided in the long run, might have been delayed.”¹
- On Count Tisza

“It is a mistaken view of history to assume that its episodes were entirely due to fundamental causes which could not be averted, and that they were not precipitated by the intervention of personality.”²
- On Sir Edward Grey

Ink on paper cannot convey the full horrors of the First World War. Statistics are weak substitutes, but they at least give a hint of its scale. 65 million men mobilised for the war of 1914-1918. If each soldier were to lie down contiguously across planet Earth, this human chain would stretch almost *three times* around the world.³ Eight million people perished in the war. That is equal to 500,000 tons in human weight, the average weight of one former tower of the World Trade Centre. Eight more million people presumably died.⁴ Another 21 million people were wounded during the war. These numbers boggle the mind.

There is a striking paradox at the heart of scholarship on the war. The July 1914 crisis which preceded the war is one of the most well documented events in history. Paradoxically, however, scholars are no closer to agreeing on the causes of that war. Francis Gavin concludes that scholars ought to accept that it is “unlikely we will ever achieve a consensus of the causes of the First World War.”⁵ This case study cannot possibly do justice to the complex debates relating to the outbreak of the war. Nevertheless, it contributes to the debate by explicitly arguing what some (not all) historians tacitly conclude: identifiable individuals caused the war, and they could have prevented it. I make the argument that the causes of the First World War are fully explained by the causal power of individuals.

Countless monographs chronicle the month of July 1914 in great detail.⁶ A case study this brief cannot hope to rival any of them in analytical depth. Thus, the most I can hope to achieve in the following chapter is a specialised analysis, focussing on the question of the role of human agency in efforts to prevent the war.⁷ In order to add value to the existing literature, I will focus on the actions of two agents who almost prevented war. Firstly, I explore the forgotten role of Count István Tisza,

¹ Vermes (1975: 68).

² Lloyd George (1938: 55).

³ This calculation is based on the average height of recruits in the army, multiplied by 65 million, divided by the circumference of the earth, which is approximately 40,008 km.

⁴ PBS (2014).

⁵ Gavin (2014: 330).

⁶ I have decided to rely on one of the most detailed and up-to-date monographs on the July crisis for my basic chronology of events, namely Sean McMeekin's *July Crisis: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013). A reviewer named it “the best for details about the July crisis...” *Ibid.* 325.

⁷ *Ibid.* 328-329.

the Hungarian Prime Minister. Secondly, I will focus on the mediation proposal of British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey, which appeared to be the most credible chance to prevent war.

In contrast to structural deterministic accounts of the war,⁸ this chapter is agent-centric. According to this approach, European leaders faced a narrowing funnel of choices in the lead-up to the First World War.⁹ That being said, like a funnel, the end never really closed. The actors may have been increasingly constrained by the dynamics of the arms race, mobilisation plans, train timetables and their beliefs, but “war was not inevitable; the leaders of Europe still had options.”¹⁰ To substantiate this point, I argue that the causal power of individual agents was the main driving force behind the crisis. Among those drivers, Count Tisza appeared to forestall the crisis single-handedly. Secondly, contingent events – forks in the road – demonstrated that agents *knew* they had options. In the analytical section of this chapter, I argue that an individualist framework of analysis is more compelling than structural deterministic accounts of the July crisis.

COUNT TISZA’S LAST STAND

Almost forgotten by history, Count Tisza was the most powerful Austro-Hungarian official to oppose war in July 1914. As the minister-president of Hungary, he consistently opposed pressure for an Austrian attack on Serbia. “Stern and colorless” and “somewhat dour,” as McMeekin describes him, “Tisza was a man of few words, but he meant what he said.”¹¹ A strong admirer of Bismarck, Tisza was a forceful and domineering political figure. Not gifted in speech, he disdained oratory and parliamentary politics. As speaker of parliament, he once broke the opposition’s resistance by calling in the police to clear the House. A member of parliament pulled out a revolver and fired three shots at him. Uninjured, he ruled that the debate continue.¹² Tisza was also a devoted Calvinist, who privately recoiled against the “terrible...misery, anguish, devastation” of all war.¹³ However, Tisza’s reluctance to use force against Serbia was not moral but primarily political and strategic. He feared that war risked undermining Hungary’s privileged position in the empire, and extending democratic rights to minorities within Hungary.¹⁴

The only comparably powerful opponent of Austrian military adventures was Archduke Franz Ferdinand.¹⁵ This is ironic, since the Archduke paid with his own life for the policy he opposed. The assassin who shot Franz Ferdinand was motivated by nationalist hatred of Austria’s annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite their common stance, Count Tisza and Franz Ferdinand had a mutual

⁸ See the ANALYSIS section below for an explanation of such theories.

⁹ Nye (2009: 79).

¹⁰ Breuning (2007: 14).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 31.

¹² Two other members of parliament were wounded in the incident. Albertini (1952: 127).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 126-128.

¹⁵ McMeekin (2013: 3).

personal dislike of one another.¹⁶ In the 1912 Balkan crisis, Franz Ferdinand had sided with foreign minister Count Leopold von Berchtold in blocking the war party which hoped to attack Serbia.¹⁷ One prominent advocate of war was Chief of Staff Conrad. He had advocated an Austrian invasion of Serbia at least *twenty-five times* in 1913 alone. Now, in 1914, Conrad saw Ferdinand's assassination as a Serbian declaration of war.¹⁸

With Ferdinand's death, the Vienna peace party was significantly weaker. Almost all of the most important Austrian foreign policy-makers advocated war. Berchtold, the intelligent but indecisive foreign minister, was one of the few prevaricators. He soon buckled under pressure from his pro-war colleagues to support a punitive Austrian war against Serbia.¹⁹ In the context of July 1914, the most powerful *undecided* decision-maker was Count Tisza. With Berchtold now falling in line behind the Austrian war party, Tisza assumed a pivotal role in history. McMeekin recounts that

Tisza first learned something important was brewing when he stopped by the Ballplatz [the foreign ministry], where he was astonished to find the normally harmless Berchtold breathing fire. There is no record of what was said, but the conversation made a dramatic impression on the Hungarian, who went so far as to compose a letter of protest to Franz Josef I...²⁰

In his 1 January letter, Tisza expressed his shock at learning of Berchtold's "intention to make the horrible deed of Sarajevo the occasion for reckoning with Serbia."²¹ The Hungarian objected that Austria "would be considered by all the world as the disturbers of peace."²² Tisza clothed his case against war in pragmatic terms. Tisza perceived a greater threat along Hungary's eastern borders than from Serbia. He told the Emperor that he would "refuse to share the responsibility" for war.²³ The implication of Tisza's stand was clear to all who had read the Austro-Hungarian constitution. As part of the 1867 political compromise, foreign minister Berchtold needed the consent of both Austria and Hungary in crafting foreign policy. A Hungarian prime minister had used this constitutional veto to keep Austro-Hungary out of the Franco-German war in 1870.²⁴ Tisza now intended to use his legal veto to prevent another war.

"War. War. War." was the refrain Conrad hammered into foreign minister Berchtold.²⁵ On the other end, the foreign minister was faced with Tisza's resolute opposition. Berchtold, between both extremes, proposed a compromise. He would recruit German assistance for a new "peace initiative",

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 28, 31, 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 31.

²¹ Cited in Austrian Red Book (1920: 14).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* 37.

²⁴ Fay (1924: 302).

²⁵ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 57).

which would mire Berlin in the crisis and deter Russian aggression.²⁶ What Berchtold did not tell the militaristic Conrad is that this initiative had actually been drafted by Tisza's hand in March. This new diplomatic strategy sought to deter Russo-French plans to "foment the world war" against Austria.²⁷ It bore the fingerprints of "Tisza's pseudo-pacifist thinking".²⁸ Berchtold's compromise effectively used Tisza's initiative as bait to lure German support for the war. By law, Tisza still had a veto over foreign policy. The emperor reaffirmed to Berchtold that he must secure Count Tisza's support for any policy.²⁹ For now, Tisza effectively checked the war party in Vienna. But Conrad and Berchtold had set in motion an insidious plan to use Tisza's initiative against him, using German pressure to break his will to resist.

In a letter to the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, Berchtold accused the Serbian government of orchestrating the Archduke's assassination. He called for the "elimination" of Serbia's power.³⁰ The Kaiser was a close friend of Franz Ferdinand's, and was emotionally distraught by his death.³¹ Berchtold made the case for an urgent punitive strike against Serbia. To avoid raising Tisza's suspicions, Berchtold gave oral instructions to an envoy, Count Hoyos, to push for war in Berlin. Tisza was intentionally kept in the dark of a major foreign policy decision. When he found out, he understood that Berchtold had twisted the meaning of his Balkan peace memorandum.³² He urgently called the foreign ministry to demand edits – but it was too late. Hoyos was already in Berlin.

The German sovereign, fearing a European war, distrusted the Austrian proposal. However, Wilhelm II, an emotional man, was goaded into expressing an opinion in favour of a punitive strike. This statement, in Berchtold's hands, could help to overcome Tisza's stubborn resistance. The German leadership thus gave Austria the infamous 'blank cheque' for a war with Serbia. That same day, Conrad secured the Austrian king's consent to attack Serbia if Germany pledged its support. The war party was gaining ground. Berchtold put further pressure on Tisza by sending the Hungarian an exaggerated account of the Kaiser's support for an Austrian attack. When he learned the contents of the Hoyos mission to Berlin, Tisza was horrified and blocked Austrian war plans.³³ At this point, as McMeekin recounts, Tisza was not simply outnumbered. He "stood essentially alone."³⁴

²⁶ McMeekin (2013: 41).

²⁷ Cited in Fay (1924: 307).

²⁸ See McMeekin (2013: 41).

²⁹ *Ibid.* 35.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 95.

³¹ In fact, as McMeekin notes, their only disagreement was over Tisza, whom the German sovereign admired and Ferdinand hated. *Ibid.* 79.

³² *Ibid.* 96-97.

³³ *Ibid.* 104-108.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 109.

In a key ministerial meeting on 7 July, Tisza faced his pro-war colleagues. Criticising the Hoyos mission, he predicted that, if Austria struck Serbia, the former would face a three-front war.³⁵ Instead, he proposed imposing terms which would ensure Serbia's *diplomatic* defeat. If Serbia rejected reasonable terms, then he might consider military action. His voice shaking with anger, Tisza threatened his resignation.³⁶ All of Tisza's colleagues hoped to use an unacceptable ultimatum as a pretext for war; Tisza alone hoped that it might *prevent* war.³⁷ Where his colleagues attempted to impress upon him the urgency of attacking Serbia, Tisza alone conjured up "the terrible calamity of a European war under present circumstances."³⁸

Tisza grew justifiably suspicious of the scheming Berchtold. He now demanded that Berchtold hand-deliver "a lengthy memoir" to the emperor.³⁹ In this letter, Tisza warned that attacking Serbia "would—if human foresight does not deceive—cause the intervention of Russia and conjure up the *world's war*."⁴⁰ Strategically, such a war disfavoured Austria-Hungary. Economically, it would devastate the already fragile empire. On moral grounds, Tisza refused "to share the responsibility of military aggression as it is proposed against Servia."⁴¹ In a renewed push, Berchtold wrote to Tisza from the royal castle. Berchtold begged Tisza to change his mind. When he failed, Berchtold extracted the Emperor's consent to draw up an ultimatum to make a Serbian rejection inevitable.⁴² Berchtold was perhaps a "blunderer, unequal to his task, an elite dandy," as historians noted, but he "clearly outmanoeuvred Tisza, for good or ill" in July 1914.⁴³

Six days later, Tisza returned to Vienna from a trip home. He now supported the war. "His resistance worn down by the constant pressure coming at him from all sides," Tisza had almost completely folded to the war party.⁴⁴ At a war council on 19 July, he at least managed to insert caveats into the ultimatum to Serbia.⁴⁵ He succeeded in blocking the annexation of Serbian territory, which Tisza feared would make a Russian attack inevitable. But Tisza's defeat was near-total. Neither he, nor the king, nor the Germans were allowed to vet the extreme terms of the ultimatum, which gave Serbia two options: submission or war. Once again – as with his June peace initiative – Berchtold took Tisza's diplomatic ploy, and transformed it into a tool of war. Tisza's idea of

³⁵ Austrian Red Book (1920: 22-33).

³⁶ Vermes (1975: 75).

³⁷ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 63-64).

³⁸ Austrian Red Book (1920: 29).

³⁹ *Ibid.* 33-34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 37.

⁴² McMeekin (2013: 121).

⁴³ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 71).

⁴⁴ McMeekin (2013: 122).

⁴⁵ Austrian Red Book (1920: 53-58).

offering Serbia a “diplomatic defeat”⁴⁶ as an alternative to war backfired. The notorious ultimatum became the trigger of the war Tisza had, very much alone, attempted to avert as long as he could.

Even after falling in line, Tisza clung to the irrational hope that Serbia may still agree to all terms of the ultimatum, thus avoiding a major European war. Tisza happened to be the first Austrian official to receive news from the Austrian ambassador to Serbia that he had severed relations. A dejected Tisza asked him: “Did it have to be?” *Musste es denn sein?*⁴⁷ The German verb Tisza employed conveys the meaning of necessity.⁴⁸ He was asking whether war inevitable. The Austrian ambassador flatly responded: “Yes”.⁴⁹ As we will see in an analytical section below, it did not have to be this way. Tisza himself, and numerous other key individuals, could have effectively prevented the First World War till the very last hour of peace.

SIR EDWARD GREY’S PROPOSAL

Like the efforts of Tisza in 1914 and Seward in 1861, those of British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey have inspired either “eulogies or indictments.”⁵⁰ Grey’s polarised place in history represents the bitter recriminations which followed the war. To his defenders, Grey was an impartial arbiter in the crisis, who did everything humanly possible to prevent war by offering to mediate on many occasions, only to be rebuffed each time.⁵¹ In contrast, to his many critics Grey was “the central enemy of the human race”.⁵² David Lloyd George was one such critic, who argued that Grey’s weak personality “was distinctly one of the elements that contributed to the great catastrophe.”⁵³ I will return, in the analysis below, to weighing the sharply polarised accounts of Grey’s role in the July crisis. For now, it is useful to paint a portrait of Grey’s physical and intellectual appearance:

His striking physiognomy with the thin lips, the firmly closed mouth, and the chiselled features gave the impression of cold hammered steel. Add to this exterior the reticence of speech and the calm level utterance on the rare occasions when he spoke...and that serene flow of unexceptionable diction...⁵⁴

Grey was a calm and reserved man, who made it to the top foreign policy position in Britain by remaining aloof of internal party political disputes. He was well aware, he later wrote, that he had “no natural gift for speaking. I never had a peroration,” he noted sadly.⁵⁵ A “lover of the country,” Grey assumed public office “without any elation; indeed with depression.”⁵⁶ While in London, Grey

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 116.

⁴⁷ Albertini (1952: 374).

⁴⁸ *Müssen*: To have to/to be forced to/to need to.

⁴⁹ Albertini (1952: 374).

⁵⁰ See Vermes (1975: vii).

⁵¹ See, for example, Murray (1915: 29-40).

⁵² *Ibid.* 6.

⁵³ See Lloyd George (1938: 56).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 56-57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 83.

⁵⁶ Grey (1935a: 76-77).

survived by looking forward to his favourite sports, tennis and fly-fishing.⁵⁷ But by 1914, Grey had serious eye problems, which undermined his ability to see tennis balls.⁵⁸ During the Sarajevo crisis, we find Grey fly-fishing at his country cottage, which he hoped to enjoy as long as his eyesight allowed it. Grey was not disturbed enough by the Archduke's assassination to cut short his holidays.⁵⁹

The dilemma in Grey's foreign policy was his attempt to balance two contradictory policies. On the one hand, Grey, partnering with Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, attempted to work with Germany to reduce naval tensions. On the other hand, Grey personally negotiated a strategic arrangement with France. In war-time, the French navy would cover the Mediterranean, while Britain defended France's north coast. Joint war planning for a potential mission to defend Belgium was detailed to the level of "the places where [the soldiers] were to drink their coffee."⁶⁰ Grey was under pressure by the Foreign Office to support France militarily.⁶¹ The French government was also pressuring Grey to begin military planning with Russia.⁶² Grey agreed to naval talks, on the understanding that they not imply alliance commitments.⁶³ When pressed, Grey downplayed the concerns of German officials. An historian called this a "deeply misleading" and "suspiciously vague assurance".⁶⁴ Some called it a bare-faced lie.⁶⁵ German leaders had no trust in Grey's assurances about the British-Russian naval talks.⁶⁶ This incident cost Grey his impartiality, at least in German eyes, during his mediation efforts in the July crisis.

Sir Edward Grey is relatively mute in his memoirs on Britain's reaction to the Sarajevo crisis. He only mentions, in passing, that he consulted Harold Nicolson at the Foreign Office. They both "agreed that, if things became more anxious and the prospects grew darker, I should propose a Conference."⁶⁷ However, a detailed discussion of the period from 28 June to 25 July is virtually missing from his memoir. This is significant, in that it obscures what Grey knew about Austrian intentions – endorsed by Tisza – to send Serbia a harsh ultimatum. Grey was well informed. On 16 July, Britain's ambassador to Vienna had warned him of Berchtold's plans for a harsh ultimatum, which Serbia could only reject.⁶⁸ Grey did not follow up on the matter.⁶⁹ If we are to believe his

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 80.

⁵⁸ Grey (1935b: 273-278).

⁵⁹ See McMeekin (2013: 76-77).

⁶⁰ Cited in *Ibid.* 73-74.

⁶¹ Mulligan (2010: 221).

⁶² See Grey (1935b: 118).

⁶³ *Ibid.* 120.

⁶⁴ See McMeekin (2013: 72).

⁶⁵ Munkler (2013: 92-101).

⁶⁶ Williamson (1988: 227).

⁶⁷ Grey (1935b: 160).

⁶⁸ McMeekin (2013: 127-129).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 129.

memoirs, Grey waited because he agonised over an “opportune moment” to suggest mediation.⁷⁰ The opportune moment came one week later.

During a state visit by French leaders in St. Petersburg, war was openly discussed.⁷¹ Russia’s foreign minister Sazonov, like Grey, was widely seen as “cowardly and weak”.⁷² But Sazonov was now threatening a “European war” against Vienna in case of an Austrian ultimatum to Serbia.⁷³ Grey learned about these crucial developments from his ambassador. Sazonov attempted to goad the British ambassador into declaring Britain’s support for Russia and France. The next day, Sazonov again tried to solicit a British declaration of support, which the ambassador again rejected. George Buchanan, British ambassador to Russia, instead suggested that Britain could “play the role of mediator at Berlin or Vienna,” a proposal which angered Sazonov.⁷⁴ Grey would have been aware of the belligerent language of French and Russian diplomats.

Grey offered to mediate the crisis on 25 July. That same day, Russia began secret mobilisation plans of its 1.1 million-man war machine adjacent Austria. Russian mobilisation was intended to be “masked by clever diplomatic negotiations, in order to lull to sleep as much as possible the enemy’s fear.”⁷⁵ Sazonov, who considered war unavoidable,⁷⁶ immediately rejected Grey’s proposal. Serbian leaders, emboldened by Russian support, rejected all but one point in the Austrian ultimatum. Grey credulously believed that Sazonov “urged a conciliatory reply at Belgrade,” rather than heightening tensions.⁷⁷ The same day, Austria’s ambassador severed diplomatic relations with Serbia and fled within 25 minutes.⁷⁸ Serbia began mobilising at 3pm; Austria-Hungary at 9:23pm.⁷⁹ The point of painting this complex picture is to give an accurate representation of the moment in which Sir Edward Grey chose to act. After one month of prevarication, it was clearly anything but opportune.

For weeks, Grey had hesitated on whether and when to propose a mediation.⁸⁰ On Saturday 25 July, he finally began to act. His idea was basically that Britain, France, Germany and Italy would mediate the crisis between *Russia* and Austria.⁸¹ The French ambassador disliked the proposal and, remarkably, did not even relay it to his foreign ministry.⁸² The Russian ambassador flatly rejected

⁷⁰ Grey (1935b: 161).

⁷¹ Cited McMeekin (2013: 157).

⁷² The Russian princess Anastasia and her sister – unlike their Disney representations – whispered in the French president’s ears about Sazonov’s weakness, and urged a military response against Austria. *Ibid.* 163.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 169-170, 176.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 195.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 193.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 178.

⁷⁷ Grey (1935b: 155).

⁷⁸ This is, according to one historian, “the speed record for the rupture of diplomatic relations.” Cited in McMeekin (2013: 201).

⁷⁹ Tisza played his part as a cog in the war machine by relaying information to the Austrian foreign ministry on Serbian military preparations that evening. *Ibid.* 202.

⁸⁰ Grey (1935b: 160).

⁸¹ McMeekin (2013: 205).

⁸² *Ibid.* 206.

Grey's idea. Only the German ambassador agreed to Grey's mediation proposal. Curiously, Grey continued to believe, wrongly, that *Germany* was mobilising first.⁸³ This reveals a questionable assumption in Grey's mediation. It appears never to have occurred to Grey that his proposal was biased against Germany, which had not yet mobilised. Such a conference might simply give France and Russia more time to mobilise against Germany. He was dismayed when the Russians rejected his proposal. The official silence from Paris also unnerved him.⁸⁴ But he judged that the "things were not yet so critical that it was unsafe to be out of town" over the weekend.⁸⁵

On 26 July, Grey left on his fly-fishing trip, leaving Nicolson in charge.⁸⁶ Inexplicably, Nicolson and Grey (from his cottage) changed the mediation proposal overnight. Prince Lichnowsky, the German ambassador, met Nicolson to warn that, if Russia mobilised on the German border, Germany would follow, and a European war would break out.⁸⁷ He asked for Britain's help to stop Russian mobilisation from sparking a war. Nicolson politely dismissed the German complaint. His answer consisted of three points:

- 1) Britain had no such information from Russia (which was untrue);⁸⁸
- 2) Russia had not yet *officially* mobilised (an academic point); and
- 3) It would be too "difficult and delicate" for Britain to restrain Russia (which was disastrous).⁸⁹

Nicolson then relayed a new mediation proposal. He proposed that the same four powers now mediate between Russia, Austria *and* Serbia. These states would no longer be expected to cease military mobilisation, only active military operations. "Nicolson had unceremoniously scuttled Grey's proposal," as McMeekin argues, "and replaced it with a new initiative inherently biased against the Central Powers."⁹⁰ This new proposal superseded the one which Germany had accepted the day before. The German ambassador was so worried about war that he accepted Grey's new proposal, without awaiting confirmation from Berlin.

On Monday 27 July, German foreign minister Gottlieb von Jagow politely rejected Grey's new mediation proposal. He suggested that Grey's proposal "would practically amount to a court of arbitration... [and] was not practicable."⁹¹ The German government preferred to await the outcome

⁸³ Grey (1935b: 162).

⁸⁴ McMeekin (2013: 206).

⁸⁵ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 232-233).

⁸⁶ Grey (1935b: 160).

⁸⁷ McMeekin (2013: 214).

⁸⁸ British ambassador Buchanan had already relayed the fact of Russian mobilisation, even though the official order had not yet been given. In practice, Russia was mobilising secretly.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 215.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 215-217.

⁹¹ This is from the report of British ambassador Goschen in his 27 July letter to Edward Grey. Cited in Grey (1935b: 166-167).

of direct Russian-Austrian talks, which it suggested were fruitful. Germany's ambassador to Russia believed that Sazonov had "lost his nerves somewhat and is now looking for a way out."⁹² Germany also wished to avoid war, von Jagow insisted, but preferred bilateral negotiation.⁹³ The German chancellor conclusively rejected Grey's second mediation proposal.⁹⁴ Grey was angered by Germany's "depressing" rebuttal.⁹⁵ He considered writing an angry reply placing the entire blame on Germany for vetoing "the only certain means of peaceful settlement".⁹⁶ However, he resisted doing so, lest his accusations make war a certainty.⁹⁷ Grey went to see the German ambassador while still visibly angry. He placed the onus squarely on Germany to mediate the crisis in Vienna, and warned that he would hold Berlin responsible for any war.

This was the crucial turning point. The German chancellor understood that Germany could not reject every one of Grey's proposals. In doing so, "we should be held responsible for the conflagration by the whole world and be represented as the real warmongers."⁹⁸ Cynically, the German leadership formally passed Grey's note to Vienna, accompanied by an oral message that Berlin was "decidedly against" it.⁹⁹ Bethman, whom Grey trusted,¹⁰⁰ was undermining his mediation efforts. The Germans tried to retain plausible deniability, to avoid Britain siding with France and Russia.¹⁰¹ This suited Vienna perfectly. Upon reading Grey's latest proposal, Berchtold decided "to send [an] official declaration of war tomorrow, at the latest the day after, in order to cut away the ground from any attempt at mediation."¹⁰² On 28 July, the German Kaiser finally became alarmed by his government's handling of the crisis, and offered "to mediate for peace in Austria."¹⁰³ But by the time the Kaiser sent his message – by courier – it was too late. Astonishingly, as McMeekin observes, Berchtold declared war two weeks earlier than the army could fight it "in effect not to answer his phone."¹⁰⁴ Austria finally declared war on Serbia.

Grey's efforts had failed to prevent an Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia. But there was still time to prevent this conflict from precipitating a European war. On July 29, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg made a now-infamous proposal to Grey. Would Britain remain neutral, he inquired, if

⁹² Cited in McMeekin (2013: 213).

⁹³ Grey (1935b: 166-167).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 168

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 170.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 171.

⁹⁸ McMeekin (2013: 235).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 236.

¹⁰⁰ Grey believed in Bethman-Hollweg's good faith, and saw him as the central figure on whom war and peace in Europe would depend. But Grey saw him as surrounded by a war party. "He was not master of the situation," Grey later insisted, "in negotiating with him we were not negotiating with a principal." *Ibid.* 172-173.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 236.

¹⁰² Keegan (1999: 67).

¹⁰³ Bethman and Jagow appeared to have instructed officials *not* to wake the Kaiser, and to intentionally delay showing him the text of the Serbian reply, as they probably foresaw how he might react. See McMeekin (2013: 242).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 246.

Germany bound itself not to annex any French territory (excluding colonies) if it were victorious?¹⁰⁵ The exhausted Bethmann gave away an elementary point of Germany's war strategy in the West: the violation of Belgian neutrality.¹⁰⁶ Grey and his ambassador in Berlin strongly rejected this proposal.¹⁰⁷ Tragically, the German leadership had misinterpreted Grey's strategic ambiguity as a declaration of neutrality. King George V had reinforced this perception by telling the German monarch that Britain "shall remain neutral."¹⁰⁸ The same day, Grey finally signalled that Britain would most likely *not* remain neutral in a coming war.¹⁰⁹ This shock signalled the end of British mediation attempts.

Late July saw more efforts to prevent what leaders finally realised would be a cataclysmic war. The German chancellor desperately urged the Austrian foreign minister to accept mediation, but Bethmann's incompetence undercut his own efforts.¹¹⁰ The Russian foreign minister effectively killed off Austrian-Russian negotiations.¹¹¹ The U.S. also offered its good offices to mediate during the July crisis, but gained no traction.¹¹² In one of the most memorable diplomatic efforts, the German Kaiser and his cousin, the Russian Tsar, entered into direct negotiations to prevent war. This famous exchange encouraged the Tsar to overcome the St. Petersburg war party, and froze Russia's mobilisation *for two days*.¹¹³ When these exchanges ended acrimoniously, the Tsar caved in to his hawkish advisers. The Russian military chief smashed his phones so that the Tsar would not be able to stop the war again.¹¹⁴ On 31 July, we find Grey still attempting to revive his four-power mediation proposal. Like his interlocutors in the crisis, Grey "gave the impression to those who saw him in these days of a man near the end of his nervous resources."¹¹⁵ It is supposedly around this time that Grey famously remarked:

The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.¹¹⁶

ANALYSIS

Grey's construction obscures the question of who was responsible for the war. No lamp-changers appear in his famous utterance, as they did in his day, to turn the lights out. The lights are simply

¹⁰⁵ Grey (1935b: 175).

¹⁰⁶ McMeekin (2013: 278).

¹⁰⁷ Grey (1935b: 175, 178-179).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 276.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 279.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 290, 306.

¹¹¹ Ferguson (2011b: 268).

¹¹² FRUS (1914).

¹¹³ See Allison (1914).

¹¹⁴ McMeekin (2013: 298).

¹¹⁵ Joll (1992: 28).

¹¹⁶ It was supposedly while watching the lamps being lit in St. James Park from his office, that he uttered those famous words. McMeekin (2013: 372).

going out, not being put out by anyone in particular. As Niall Ferguson has noted, “few events in modern history have been subjected to more deterministic interpretations than the outbreak of the First World War.”¹¹⁷ Alliances in 1914, the theory goes, made Europe a powder keg in want of a spark, and an archduke’s assassination was enough to light the fuse.¹¹⁸ Historical actors’ memoirs have often conveyed the sense of being helplessly “carried away by the tide of history”.¹¹⁹ Historians and IR scholars often search for the very “historical forces which...explain the decisions of individuals as part of a broader and inevitable historical process.”¹²⁰ This bends the historical narrative of the July crisis through a “teleological tunnel”, as William Mulligan argues.¹²¹ Deterministic accounts of the July 1914 crisis rest on the assumption, spoken or unspoken, that no human action would have sufficed to prevent the war. The assumption is that an unbroken chain of causation linked Gavrilo Princip’s trigger finger to the deaths of millions of soldiers on the war’s battlefields.

In hindsight, many actors sought to justify their decisions with appeals to deterministic forces. The German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg said, during the July crisis, that he sensed “a force of fate stronger than the power of humans, hanging over Europe and our people.”¹²² Grey also saw himself as fundamentally passive. “In a great crisis,” he wrote, “a man who has to act or speak stands bare and *stripped of choice*.”¹²³ Channelling Martin Luther, he cryptically theorised that such a person “has to do what it is in him to do...and he can do no other.”¹²⁴ After the war, however, Grey lost sleep on this very question.¹²⁵

I used to torture myself by questioning whether by foresight or wisdom I could have prevented the war... but I have come to think that no human individual could have prevented it.¹²⁶

We should not take the “broken, disappointed self-apologist of the memoirs” at his word, Ferguson warns.¹²⁷ The image of impersonal forces *pushing* powerless leaders towards war is misleading. The obvious function of these “images of natural catastrophe” is to persuade readers that politicians did not cause the war.¹²⁸ But Grey’s incredible remark suggests that there may be a simpler motive than

¹¹⁷ Ferguson (2011b: 229).

¹¹⁸ On the debate regarding the structural (‘powder keg’) and the direct (‘spark’) causes of the First World War, see Goertz and Levy (2007).

¹¹⁹ See Joll (1992: 38).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Mulligan (2010: 227).

¹²² Cited in Ferguson (2011b: 229).

¹²³ Emphasis added. Grey (1935b: 215).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 259.

¹²⁶ Cited in Ferguson (2011b: 229).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 231.

cynically shirking political responsibility for the carnage of the war. Rejecting their ability to prevent the war may represent a deeper moral or psychological coping mechanism.¹²⁹

Many individuals clearly acted purposively to make war break out in July 1914. If Sarajevo was the spark, numerous people blew on the fuse, and shielded it from attempts to extinguish the flame. A more nuanced understanding of the July crisis not only assumes that the outbreak of war was not inevitable in July 1914, but that it was perhaps improbable.¹³⁰ The real tragedy of the First World War is that it could have been prevented “at any point during the five weeks of crisis,” as John Keegan put it.¹³¹ From this perspective, it was precisely the decisions of individual statesmen which narrowed the “freedom of action of governments and closed actions” in a vicious cycle.¹³² The July 1914 crisis provides “ample examples of the role of contingency in human affairs,” as Williamson and Van Wyk argue.¹³³ It is, therefore, an ideal case study of human agency.

I will now demonstrate the point that certain agents almost prevented the First World War. I will begin by reviewing Tisza’s change of mind. Secondly, I return to Sir Edward Grey’s numerous mediation proposals. Contrary to Grey’s self-apologetic remarks, I argue that he could have acted much more effectively. Finally, I conclude with a broader point about agency in the July crisis. I also argue out that historical contingency often arises from chance events like heart attacks, nightmares and other unpredictable events.

What happened in six days to change Tisza’s mind so radically from immovable obstruction to supporting a war which he alone foresaw might end in world war? It was obvious to all proponents of war, in July 1914, “that without Tisza’s approval there was nothing they could do.”¹³⁴ His legendary stubbornness makes his change of mind doubly difficult to understand. “Of all the problems concerning the outbreak of the war in 1914,” one historian remarked, “none has been more obscure than Count Tisza’s sudden abandonment of his position to a declaration of war.”¹³⁵ This is one of the great ‘what ifs’ of the July crisis, revealing the decisive role of agency in causing the war.¹³⁶ Several factors may explain Tisza’s about-face.

The first potential factor was an unrelated, chance event. On 10 July, Russia’s anti-Austrian ambassador in Belgrade collapsed of a heart attack – on the floor of the *Austrian* embassy. His sudden death fed Serbian chauvinism and rumours of Austrian foul play.¹³⁷ Berchtold capitalised on

¹²⁹ The “sense of helplessness of man in the face of the inexorable processes of history,” one historian noted, “provided a relief from the overwhelming sense of responsibility which some politicians certainly felt.” Joll (1992: 237).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Keegan (1999: 3).

¹³² Mulligan (2010: 37).

¹³³ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 259).

¹³⁴ Vermes (1975: 68).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 259).

¹³⁷ See McMeekin (2013: 118-119).

this show of Serbian aggressiveness to pressure Tisza.¹³⁸ Secondly, as a pan-German, Tisza cited Germany's diplomatic support for Austria-Hungary as having swayed him.¹³⁹ There is evidence that Berchtold exaggerated, and may even have tampered with, the content of German telegrams to force Tisza to consent to war.¹⁴⁰ A fourth and crucial factor is that Tisza's closest confidantes held pro-war views.¹⁴¹ Whatever the ultimate cause of his change of mind, which we may never know, the effect of Tisza's decision is undisputed.

After his 14 July conversion to the war party, Tisza was "a changed man."¹⁴² On 31 July, when Edward Grey proposed his last mediation, it was Tisza who reportedly strengthened Berchtold's resolve to undercut this peace effort.¹⁴³ It was Tisza "who raised Berchtold's flagging spirits when the peace proposal of Sir Edward Grey seemed to jeopardize the plans of the war party."¹⁴⁴ Hence, Tisza's change of mind twice brought Europe closer to war. Underneath this convert's zeal, Tisza was still deeply loyal to the Dual Monarchy and a staunch supporter of the German alliance. An anecdote reveals that Tisza swallowed his opposition to war out of "a perverse sense of duty".¹⁴⁵ When the war began, throngs chanted Tisza's name in the streets, but he remained despondent.¹⁴⁶ When a sea of pro-war Hungarians chanted his name, Tisza's colleagues begged him to address the crowds. Tisza refused.

The Minister President was sitting on a low chair in the hall, smoking a cigar and looking as remote and introspective as ever.... There the man sat, in a deep armchair, not speaking to anyone, with a dark expression on his face, his teeth clenched... motionless, staring ahead of him as if all he could see was the tragic fate of his country.¹⁴⁷

Tisza's colleagues were angry at his inaction, which they could not understand:

They could not have known that Tisza was opposed to the war... he had accepted responsibility for a war he had fought hard to prevent. Out of a perverse sense of duty he accepted a task he loathed, the task of organising a war knowing full well what it would mean. He accepted it in silence, a silence that lasted until his death.¹⁴⁸

During the war, Tisza visited the front, where a disgruntled soldier attempted to kill him. In 1918, when a revolution broke out in Hungary, Tisza was blamed as the villain of the war. A group of

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 120.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 122.

¹⁴⁰ Vermes (1975: 75).

¹⁴¹ A friend of Tisza's, Count Fogarich, later wrote to Berchtold that "Tisza's change of mind was most influenced not by you but by Burián [another friend], whom he trusted very much." See *Ibid.* 76-77.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 78

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 79.

¹⁴⁵ This anecdote is from a Hungarian novel, but is actually based on the author's factual observation of this scene. Thursfield (1998: 194).

¹⁴⁶ Vermes (1975: 75).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 194-195.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

armed soldiers broke into his home and shot him. Tisza had been forewarned, but chose to stay.¹⁴⁹ His last words were: “It had to happen this way.”¹⁵⁰

Count Tisza’s last stand, in July 1914, almost managed to prevent an Austria’s war with Serbia. Tisza was no saint. He had fought to prevent war to protect Magyar supremacy in the empire.¹⁵¹ There is much truth to Franz Ferdinand’s critique of Tisza as a pretentious dictator. Vienna “trembles” and “everyone grovels before him” when he is in town, Ferdinand complained.¹⁵² Some have blamed Tisza’s three-week delay for making Austria’s attack on Serbia a premeditated murder, rather than a crime of passion.¹⁵³ This is an unfair point. Tisza bore responsibility for converting to the war party, and he bore it silently to the end of his life. However, it is misguided to cast the first stone at Tisza, the *only* opponent of war in Vienna. It is terrifying to think that, but for one man’s change of mind, the First World War would not have occurred. But it is only terrifying because it appears true.

Historical scholarship, which has practically overlooked Tisza, has been less kind to Grey. Post-war debates have featured at least three criticisms of Grey’s conduct during the July crisis. Grey clearly saw, in July 1914, the “possible blood guilt” which he might inherit, and “was resolved that I would have none of it on my head.”¹⁵⁴ It is in this spirit that he set out to prevent a European war. However, I agree with revisionist accounts of the crisis, which place a much larger share of responsibility on Grey’s head than he was prepared to admit.

A major critique of Grey’s foreign policy is that he consistently misled the British parliament, and Germany, about the commitments he had made to France and Russia in the event of war.¹⁵⁵ The implication is that Grey acted in bad faith during the crisis. Ferguson argues that Grey tacitly signalled a British continental commitment in the event of war.¹⁵⁶ In doing so, he may have encouraged the Russian foreign minister to assume Britain’s support in a war with Germany.¹⁵⁷ The hawks at the Foreign Office also had Grey’s ear, including Nicolson, who pushed for a formal military alliance with France and Russia.¹⁵⁸ Grey was an interventionist at heart, and would rather have resigned than watch France be crushed in a war.¹⁵⁹ But he kept his preference hidden until the

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* ix.

¹⁵⁰ The author of a 1966 doctoral dissertation on Tisza concluded: “If one believes the way a man dies is forecast and predestined by the way he lived, then Tisza could not have died in any other manner... a soldier’s death – brutal and raw...and alone.” *Ibid.* 204.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 71.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 66.

¹⁵³ This argument first surfaced in a 1963 biography of Berchtold, and is mimicked by McMeekin’s modern account of the July crisis. See *Ibid.* 80; and McMeekin (2013: 122).

¹⁵⁴ Grey (1935b: 159).

¹⁵⁵ Kollerstrom (2011).

¹⁵⁶ Ferguson (2011b: 247).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 252.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 253.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 177.

last few days of the crisis, when he led efforts to bring Britain into the war.¹⁶⁰ Only Grey and Churchill favoured intervention in a war regardless of whether Belgian neutrality was violated.¹⁶¹ All of this helps to justify the critique that Grey was *not* a disinterested mediator. Even as he offered mediation proposals in late July, Grey collaborated with Churchill to use British fleet movements to send signals of military deterrence.¹⁶²

Grey and Nicolson consistently denied Russia's early and menacing mobilisation. Grey was even "impatient" at Germany's request that Britain seek to restrain Russia.¹⁶³ He justifies his inaction by insisting that he could do nothing but send his "pious hopes" to Russia to cease mobilising.¹⁶⁴ This is a striking admission that Grey *knew* about Russia's mobilisation.¹⁶⁵ He claims that Germany's rejection of his mediation "struck out of my hand what might have been a lever to influence Russia to suspend military preparations."¹⁶⁶ This self-serving justification is disingenuous or confused. His second proposal explicitly *rejected* the need to pressure Russia. Grey's memoir therefore accuses Germany of undermining a policy he never actually pursued. As a long-standing advocate of strong Anglo-Russian relations, some historians have concluded that Grey's bias led him "to appease Russia in the July crisis."¹⁶⁷ What is clear is that he consistently downplayed alarming reports of Russian mobilisation, and the fears it caused in Berlin.

A second critique of Grey's stance in the crisis adopts the French and Russian perspective. George Bernard Shaw argued that Grey's position that Britain was neither-neutral-nor-allied confused the other powers.¹⁶⁸ Grey's policy was "not to have a policy".¹⁶⁹ Shaw supports the claim that "the one chance of averting war was to convince [Germany] bluntly that if they took on the French Republic they would have to take on the British Empire, too."¹⁷⁰ This is a bridge too far. It is fair to say that *a clearer signal* of British policy may have influenced events. However, it is another argument altogether to suggest that British support for Russia and France could have prevented war. On this point, we must give Grey credit in his argument that, such a belligerent stance would simply have precipitated the war sooner.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁰ See McMeekin (2013: 368-370).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 269.

¹⁶² Cited in Churchill (1923: 198).

¹⁶³ Grey (1935b: 182).

¹⁶⁴ He did not do even this much, which may have given Sazonov pause for thought. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ On 24 July, Grey would have read (via Buchanan's cable) Sazonov's signal "that Russian mobilisation would at any rate have to be carried out," or a decision taken in the next 24 hours. It is doubly striking, in this context, that Grey did not take German fears seriously. Scott (1916: 881, 891). See also Clark (2014: 495).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Mulligan (2010: 222-223).

¹⁶⁸ Shaw (1916).

¹⁶⁹ McMeekin (2013: 281).

¹⁷⁰ Shaw (1916).

¹⁷¹ McMeekin (2013: 267).

A similar argument is that Grey could have prevented war by accepting the German bid for British neutrality.¹⁷² This argument falls apart upon closer inspection. It is not fair to critique Grey for failing to pledge Britain's neutrality – which his entire policy was designed to avoid. A fairer critique is that Grey seriously mismanaged his communications with Germany. After this first neutrality proposal, Grey proposed to the Germans that Britain would “remain neutral so long as German troops remain on defensive and do not cross French frontier, and French abstain from crossing German frontier”.¹⁷³ Grey shocked Paris and Berlin alike. He did not realise the implications, which implied that Britain would deter *France* from attacking. It is little wonder that Grey back-pedalled from his own proposal. This leads us to a more pertinent critique: Grey was an incompetent communicator.¹⁷⁴

The above critiques effectively boil down to the circular argument that *had* Grey pursued an entirely different policy, he would have pursued a policy which might have prevented war. This is an easy argument which reveals little. Grey undeniably had “far greater freedom of action than his memoirs subsequently suggested.”¹⁷⁵ However, he still did not have *unlimited* agency, and we should be careful not to over-state the constraints on his room for manoeuvre. Grey was an imperfect human being, with imperfect information, in an extremely divided cabinet, attempting an extraordinary balancing act. A convincing critique of Grey is that he could have made a crucial difference by simply being clearer, quicker and more decisive in executing *his own policy*. Grey took action “only when the conflagration was on the point of breaking out and no six or seven days earlier,” as one historian concluded. “The pity is that his mind moved too slowly.”¹⁷⁶ Had he clearly warned the German leadership of Britain's intentions six days earlier than he did, some suggest, war would not have broken out in August 1914.¹⁷⁷

Proceeding from his own assumptions, and from the information he knew, we can construct a more devastating critique. As I will argue, it was principally Grey's “tactic of studied ambiguity” which backfired. Grey was effectively saying: we are not neutral, but we are not allied. But it signalled the opposite of what he intended: to Germany, that Britain would remain neutral; to France and Russia, that it would not.¹⁷⁸ Rather than deter the belligerents, Grey may have unwittingly emboldened them.

¹⁷² Kollerstrom (2011).

¹⁷³ McMeekin (2013: 348).

¹⁷⁴ There is evidence, for example, that Grey's mixed signals confused other players, especially leaders in Paris, Berlin and his own diplomatic representatives abroad (Clark 2014: 502, 532, 533, 535).

¹⁷⁵ See Ferguson (2011b: 247).

¹⁷⁶ Albertini (1952: 643).

¹⁷⁷ Levy (1991: 74).

¹⁷⁸ Ferguson (2011b: 265).

Grey later wrote that “there was no other line open to me” than his ambiguous position.¹⁷⁹ I argue that Grey did have alternative lines open to him. Had Grey pursued *his own* initial strategy more clearly, the July crisis would likely have taken a radically different turn. Using his own assumptions, we can build a more effective mediation strategy which he actually considered. As the mediator of the 1912-1913 London conferences, Grey had discovered that a permanent body of standing negotiators could help to avoid great power war.¹⁸⁰ A mild Germanophobe, Grey was resentful of Germany’s obstructionism in July 1914.¹⁸¹ A man of limited imagination, he could not understand why Berlin was inveterately suspicious of all British actions.¹⁸² He did not perceive his secret military conversations with the French and Russians as having any relation to German fears. The key to peace *had* to lie in Berlin, he simplistically believed.

Grey was later rightly criticised for ignoring Austria-Hungary’s enormous sway in fomenting the Sarajevo crisis.¹⁸³ For much of the crisis, he appeared uninterested in putting pressure on Austria-Hungary to prevent a war, let alone meeting with relevant ambassadors in London until mid-July.¹⁸⁴ Berlin did act duplicitously in vetoing Grey’s mediation behind his back. In this sense, Grey’s bias was somewhat right, even if it over-simplified reality.¹⁸⁵ Four assumptions guided Grey’s worldview and policies:

1. A modern war would be catastrophic, and must be prevented.
2. Germany was the decisive actor in restraining its Austrian ally.
3. If a war came, Britain could not remain neutral, and must support France.
4. No pledge must be given to France and Russia, which might embolden them.¹⁸⁶

A final assumption is that Grey could not step beyond the constraints of a split cabinet. That is, Grey could neither extend firm commitments to France and Russia, nor proclaim British neutrality. His strategy was bound to navigating the extremely narrow channel between both. Within those constraints, we can decisively rebut Grey’s self-apologia that “there was no other line open to me.” He could have acted sooner and more forcefully within the same constraints.

Firstly, Grey’s mediation was not only undermined by his strategic ambiguity, but his delay in acting. Britain’s ambassador to Russia had urged Grey, on 24 July, to clearly warn Berlin and Vienna “that if war became general, it would be difficult for England to remain neutral.”¹⁸⁷ Had

¹⁷⁹ Grey (1935b: 195).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 108-110.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 216.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 262.

¹⁸³ See Grey (1935a: 3-4).

¹⁸⁴ Williamson and Van Wyk (2003: 226-228).

¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, Grey later tacitly admitted that Germany’s role was more nuanced by criticising the infamous German “war guilt” clause in the Treaty of Versailles. Grey (1935a: 3-6).

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ McMeekin (2013: 279-280).

Grey issued this veiled (but, in fact, truthful) warning in both capitals over the next few days, Britain may have effectively nipped the crisis in the bud. This policy accords with *all four points* in Grey's worldview set out above. I propose to build on this point as the basis of a mediation proposal which Grey could easily have pursued.

As we saw, Grey's initial proposal consisted of Britain, France, Germany and Italy mediating the crisis between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Berlin had accepted it; Paris and St. Petersburg had rejected it. At this critical juncture, let us suppose that Grey did *not* concoct a new variant of his proposal overnight and leave the hawkish, pro-French Nicolson to ham-fistedly explain this initiative to Germany. Instead, let us assume that Grey had thought:

The Germans are open to it; Britain's friends are not. Since France and Russia want British security guarantees, I have more influence with both than with Germany. I must first work on bringing these powers to accept my proposal while I have German support, which is the key to restraining Austria.

In this counter-factual universe, Grey, acting on this intuition, would have left his country home in a hurry to return to work at the Foreign Ministry. On the way, he would have madly scribbled the following points of his mediation strategy on the back of a napkin on the train:

1. Instruct Bertie [ambassador to France] to enquire about grounds for French rejection. If they cite fear of signalling British neutrality, instruct him to clearly state that nothing would do more than estrange Britain from France than if the latter undermines mediation.
2. Send instructions to Buchanan [ambassador to Russia] with the same message. Ensure that this message reaches the Tsar; he is one of the few proponents of peace.
3. Summon Lichnowsky, express gratitude for Germany's cooperation and agree to urgency of restraining Austria and Russia to preserve peace. Stress that Britain stands ready to facilitate mediation, in London or elsewhere. Couple this appeal with a clear and forceful statement "*that if war became general, it would be difficult for England to remain neutral.*" Therefore, Britain counts on Germany's unconditional support.
4. For good measure, send telegram to Goschen [ambassador to Berlin] containing the thrust of the same message, to be communicated to Bethmann-Hollweg, Jagow and the Kaiser. Coordinate a royal message from British sovereign, the Kaiser's cousin, to reinforce the importance of a successful British mediation *for the sake of European peace and Anglo-German relations.*
5. If Germany obstructs, offer the concession that Britain pressure Russia to freeze mobilisation. If Russia and France obstruct, offer the concession that Serbia might attend the conference. If they continue to obstruct, threaten (even if not true) that Britain might consider a neutrality pledge after all.
6. Instruct De Bunsen [ambassador to Vienna] and Buchanan to pressure on Berchtold and Sazonov, respectively, to attend the conference. Communicate the message to the Austro-Hungarian sovereign, and to known proponents of peace, including Count Tisza, to amplify pressure.
7. Impose a delay of 24 hours for confirmation attendance. Schedule start of conference for 27 July.

In this scenario, Grey would not have betrayed any one of his policy constraints. He may admittedly have needed some imaginative capacity in courting German support, and in realising the importance of France, Russia and Austria in the crisis. However, short of this, Grey proposed this scheme himself. The main difference is that, in real life, Grey did not interrupt his fly fishing trip, subverted

his own proposal, and left the Foreign Office in the hands of a hawkish pro-French official at the most critical time in modern British history.

Granted, we can never know whether the above strategy would have prevented war. Even if the parties *had* met in London, a critic might argue, this conference would have likely have broken up acrimoniously. War could have been delayed by a week, but not prevented. Let us briefly consider this second-order counter-factual. With the parties in one place, they would have been forced to react to allegations, rebut critiques and clarify their intentions on the spot. This conference would have no doubt been extremely heated. It may not even have prevented *some* type of war. But granting the critique that this conference may have failed, any war which came may have been a different one. Supposing that Grey ably chaired and kept such an extraordinary meeting together for a further week or two without a shot being fired, the strategic landscape would have been radically different.

Russia would have come close to completing its large-scale military mobilisation for all the world to see. Britain could not credibly have denied this fact at the conference. The Russian government would have faced the choice of using the tactical military advantage of mobilisation – attacking first – or losing it. If Russia did not attack first, its military juggernaut could not remain on high alert for a protracted period of time due to the immense resources this wasted. In the short term, with Germany backing this mediation, war would not have broken out in August 1914.

One of history's great unknowns is what may have occurred had Edward Grey reached out, via his ambassador in Vienna, to Count Tisza. Had such a correspondence simply existed in the crisis, these two powerful individuals may have realised their shared interest in preventing war. Tisza, whose close friends included international bankers,¹⁸⁸ could feasibly have interacted with Grey through backchannels. With Grey's powerful support prior to his infamous change of mind, Tisza may have resisted the Austrian hawks' pressure for a further two weeks. During this time, Tisza could have made a good faith British mediation of the Serbian crisis the *sine qua non* of his agreement to any future military action.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the fictitious Grey-Tisza correspondence had simply fizzled out. We may further assume that Grey's mediation conference in London had broken up dramatically. If, as is likely, the Russian hawks were still ascendant in St. Petersburg, they may have pressured the weak sovereign to attack Austria upon the failure of the conference. In this case, Austria would have been at war with Russia and Serbia. France would likely have joined Russia. This would have been a major war, but with Britain and Germany still on the sidelines, not yet a

¹⁸⁸ See Joll (1992: 160).

European war. Without German involvement, it is *extremely* unlikely that Britain would get involved.¹⁸⁹ This leads us to an almost incomprehensibly plausible scenario.

The fate of world peace hung on the actions of the German leaders. Had Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and the Kaiser realised – as they only realised belatedly in the real world – that German and Austrian hawks were conspiring to create a major war, they could have thwarted them. Germany could still have rescinded its blank cheque. Rather than ordering mobilisation prematurely, Berlin could have adopted a policy of passive defence – waiting to be attacked in order to gain international support for a war of self-defence. In this counter-factual universe, a Germany which faced a two-front war not of its own making, and which did not violate Belgian sovereignty, would have been a clear victim of Franco-Russian aggression. It would have had a natural ally in Britain, which would either have remained neutral, or could even have threatened France with sanctions or worse if it did not come to peace terms. Without the might of the British Empire on the Western Front, France would almost certainly have lost a war with Germany in 1914. Without Britain, in short, this European conflict would likely not have become a *world* war.¹⁹⁰ Hitler may never have risen to power. The Second World War may never have occurred. The present would be unrecognisable.

In this way, we see that even if Grey's mediation conference failed – which it need not have – any European war in late 1914, or early 1915, could have taken a radically divergent course. It would have been a different war. The above counterfactual reveals the disproportionate extent to which the greatest events, such as world wars, hinge upon the smallest, like a leader's personality. In the best case scenario, Grey's mediation would have succeeded in simply gaining enough time for the crisis to gradually deescalate. Granted, this would have left underlying strategic rivalries intact. This would still have been a much better outcome than the First World War. What is certain is that Grey's argument that he had no alternative lines beyond those he said, and that he stood stripped of choice in July 1914, is false. This conclusion, even if valid, does not challenge one historian's assessment that Grey's conduct was "honourable and rational" in the crisis.¹⁹¹ This is an altogether different question. Grey appears to be one of the few leaders genuinely, even desperately, committed to preventing a major war during the crisis. The blood guilt for the war was not his.

¹⁸⁹ We can confidently make this this argument for reasons we have already established: the Cabinet was profoundly split, with only Grey and Churchill in favour of support France in any war with Germany, whatever its causes. A coordinated French-Russian attack against a passive Germany would have *almost certainly* made it politically impossible for Grey to mount the case for British involvement in the war on the side of France.

¹⁹⁰ Britain's entry into the war spread military operations to Africa and parts of Asia and the Pacific, as Mulligan notes (2010: 225).

¹⁹¹ Harris (2003: 298).

CONCLUSION

This case study raised three important points on agency in diplomatic efforts to prevent war. The first point is banal but important: personality matters. As David Lloyd George wrote of Edward Grey, his personality was inextricably linked to his actions during the crisis.¹⁹² It is obvious that a stronger or weaker personality may have played Grey's role differently.¹⁹³ The personality traits of key agents can have an enormous influence on the course of an international crisis. What is less obvious is that the causal link between an actor's personality and choices is not deterministic. As we saw in the case of Count Tisza's efforts, this individual was strong-minded enough to endure the pressure of a powerful pro-war lobby in Vienna and Berlin. Yet even Tisza ultimately relented under pressure. In 1861, an equally strong-minded leader, Abraham Lincoln, did not budge an inch under heavy psychological pressure. We will return to this comparison in CHAPTER 8, as it contains insights which are particularly relevant to preventive diplomacy.

Secondly, this case revealed the pivotal role of contingent events, if not sheer luck, which resembled, at a few important points, the indeterministic roll of a die. The fact that Russia's ambassador died in the Austrian embassy, and the Serbian hatred it provoked, was an entirely fortuitous event which Berchtold manipulated to wear down Tisza's resolve. Other contingent events, such as the Kaiser being asleep on one crucial evening, opened up causal paths which, in their absence, would not have been possible. Finally, the individualist framework of this thesis gave the reader a view of a crisis "saturated with agency."¹⁹⁴ Christopher Clark argues that this approach is superior to the structural view of history, which "has a distorting effect, because it creates the illusion of a steadily building causal pressure," leading to an inevitable explosion.¹⁹⁵ In this view, "political actors become mere executors of forces long established and beyond their control."¹⁹⁶ It was the conscious and self-reflexive decisions of actors alone which determined the outbreak of the war. Far from an unavoidable catastrophe, it was a war of choice. Further proof of this argument can be found in another great power crisis which ended peacefully. A potential Sino-American war, I will argue, pivoted upon the wills of a few individuals.

¹⁹² Lloyd George (1938: 55).

¹⁹³ "A gifted and resolute person has often postponed for centuries a catastrophe which appeared imminent and which but for him would have befallen." *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ This is a method which Clark (2014: xxvii) endorses.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Dag Hammarskjöld – The Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1954-1955

“This case is one of those which history suddenly lifts up to key significance...”
- Dag Hammarskjöld¹

Between 1839 and 1861, Scott’s and Seward’s efforts to prevent war were carried out in face-to-face encounters, and slow and gruelling written exchanges. Official letters took weeks to cross the Atlantic during the Aroostook crisis. The press played a growing role. In 1914, the crisis played out at an alarming rapidity, over days not months. Diplomatic exchanges were dense, instantaneous and pervasive, even confusingly so. Only the old-fashioned Kaiser sent his last desperate peace effort by courier to Vienna, rather than via telegram or telephone.² History has not recorded how far this courier travelled before Austria declared war. Forty years and two world wars later, preventive diplomacy had entered the modern age. In 1954, the U.S. and China almost went to war over the future of Taiwan. While communication technology had not altered radically since the First World War, those labouring to prevent war now worked under the shadow of nuclear weapons and journalists. The key architect of preventive diplomacy, in 1954, was Dag Hammarskjöld, who also coined the term.

The son of Sweden’s prime minister during the First World War, Dag Hammarskjöld was the second head of the United Nations. Between 1954 and 1955, he was instrumental in facilitating a peaceful de-escalation of the first Taiwan Strait crisis. Subsequent scholarship has framed his initiative as a minor diplomatic mission on the periphery of the crisis.³ Drawing on under-studied archival sources, this case study provides a richer picture of the immense challenges and tactical successes of Dag Hammarskjöld’s mission to prevent a great-power war over Taiwan. I will first reconstruct the context of U.S.-China tensions in the early Cold War. Secondly, I trace Hammarskjöld’s mission to China to release captured U.S. pilots. Thirdly, I recount how the U.S. and China almost went to war, before Zhou Enlai and Chiang Kai-Shek chose to deescalate the crisis. Finally, I explain how Hammarskjöld linked his mission to the broader task of preventing U.S.-China war in the Taiwan Strait. This case demonstrates a powerful agent acting within extremely narrow institutional constraints, yet making a tangible difference to a great power crisis in the face of these structural limits.

¹ Cited in Froehlich (2008: 138).

² McMeekin (2013: 244).

³ Similarly, in accounts of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, American scholars usually credit the calm determination of U.S. leaders for the avoidance of war. In 1962, Secretary-General U Thant, Hammarskjöld’s successor, played an equally forgotten role in mediating the crisis. However, U Thant owed his enlarged mandate to Hammarskjöld’s actions in the 1954 Taiwan Strait Crisis. See Dorn and Pauk (2009).

BACKGROUND

During the Chinese Civil War (1927-1950), the U.S. provided military aid to the nationalist forces of the Republic of China (ROC) against those of the People's Republic of China (PRC). By 1950, ROC forces had retreated to the island of Formosa (Taiwan), and a few islands hugging the Chinese mainland. In January 1950, the Truman administration excluded Taiwan from the U.S. defence perimeter, spelling the end of the ROC.⁴ The PRC scheduled a military campaign to 'liberate' Taiwan by summer 1951.⁵ But the beginning of the Korean War prompted the U.S. to interpose the Seventh Fleet across the Taiwan Strait. Beijing delayed the Taiwan operation, redirecting its armed forces to the Korean border. Mao Zedong planned a new campaign against Taiwan when the Korean War ended.⁶

The first Taiwan Strait crisis began at dawn on 3 September 1954. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched a sustained artillery attack on Quemoy, one of the ROC-held islands closest to the mainland. The shelling killed two U.S. military advisors among Taiwanese victims.⁷ Competing explanations of Chinese intentions abound. One prominent argument is that Mao tried to deter the U.S. from concluding an alliance with the ROC.⁸ Mao himself appeared to convey this intention to Zhou Enlai.⁹ Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had recently announced that the U.S. was considering the creation of a Northeast Asian NATO. A second explanation is that Mao considered China vulnerable to a U.S. attack on three fronts. He may therefore have been attempting to pre-empt a U.S.-backed invasion.¹⁰ A third theory is that Mao erratically micro-managed this operation "without a long-term strategy nor a short-term plan."¹¹ Whatever Mao's intentions, the U.S. did not perceive them as limited.

Early accounts of the crisis stressed that President Dwight D. Eisenhower steered a successful "policy of restraint and avoidance of conflict in the Taiwan Strait."¹² However, new evidence suggests that Eisenhower dangerously escalated the crisis. The mentality of preventive war had gained ground among senior American officials.¹³ Truman was so frustrated by the protracted Korean War that he considered blockading China's entire coast, and threatening its cities with

⁴ Matsumoto (2012: 78)

⁵ Jian (2001: 166).

⁶ Sheng (2008: 480-481).

⁷ Matsumoto (2012: 83).

⁸ *Ibid.* 84.

⁹ Sheng (2008: 483).

¹⁰ As Michael Sheng argues, this sense of "inevitability" had compelled Mao to enter the Korean War. *Ibid.* 484.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 479.

¹² Gordon (1985: 640).

¹³ Patton advocated arming the captured Germans under American occupation, and expelling the Russians from Germany. He was confident that, within ten days, he could "have enough incidents happen to have us at war with those sons of bitches and make it look like their fault." Cited in Buhite and Hamel (1990: 371-372).

nuclear annihilation.¹⁴ Eisenhower also considered using nuclear strikes to force China to make peace.¹⁵ Had he implemented this decision, the U.S. may also have had to launch a sustained nuclear attack on the USSR. Additionally, the U.S. had covertly supported the ROC's intention of reconquering the Chinese mainland.¹⁶ Admiral Arthur Radford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, presented Chiang Kai-Shek with a detailed plan for a major "counter-invasion" of the mainland.¹⁷

With escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait, the U.S. was divided. Hawks were pushing for a U.S. defence of the islands, and a nuclear attack on China if it responded.¹⁸ Dulles and Eisenhower agreed on what appears to be a three-pronged response to the crisis. The first part of their approach involved "keeping the enemy guessing" about U.S. intentions.¹⁹ The second leg of the U.S. strategy was to ask the UN to mediate. This was largely a propaganda move to divide the Soviet bloc and paint China as the aggressor. Dulles foresaw that the initiative would be rejected by Chiang. He therefore "sought to keep the American hand in this UN initiative hidden," as Brands recounts, working through the proxy of New Zealand.²⁰ The secret plan was called *Oracle*. U.S. leaders delayed this mediation until after mid-term elections, to avoid facing accusations of appeasement.²¹ The third leg of the U.S. response served to reassure Chiang, who doubted that Eisenhower would fight China over Taiwan. To secure his endorsement of the UN ceasefire, the U.S. offered Chiang a formal defence treaty. As a compromise, the treaty was ambiguous on whether it covered the offshore islands.²² The U.S. extracted a secret guarantee that the ROC would consult Washington before launching a military attack against China.²³

On 23 November, the PRC imprisoned 13 American pilots on espionage charges, claiming that they had spied on China during the Korean War. With mounting war talk in Washington, the U.S. once again postponed *Oracle*.²⁴ Although the administration did not admit it, Chinese allegations were true concerning several of the pilots, who were actually CIA agents.²⁵ On 3 December, President Eisenhower broached the possibility of war with China in the press.²⁶ The next day, the U.S. representative to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge, requested that Hammarskjöld put the issue of

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 378.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 379.

¹⁶ Matsumoto (2012: 80).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 81.

¹⁸ With the islands within "wading distance" of the Chinese mainland, in Eisenhower's own terms, it is unthinkable that China would *not* respond. Chang (1988: 99-100).

¹⁹ Chang and Di (1993: 1511-1512).

²⁰ Brands (1988: 132).

²¹ Accinelli (1990: 332), Kaufman (2004: 109-112).

²² Matsumoto (2012: 89).

²³ Accinelli (1990: 332-333).

²⁴ See Kaufman (2003: 115).

²⁵ Brands (1998: 135).

²⁶ Cited in Miller (1962: 34).

the captured U.S. airmen on the agenda of the General Assembly.²⁷ The President conveyed to Hammarskjöld that “this was a great responsibility of his.”²⁸ This seemed to convince the Swede that he should go to Beijing.²⁹ After a heated debate between Cold War blocs, the General Assembly finally empowered Hammarskjöld to use “the means most appropriate in his judgment” to release the pilots.³⁰

HAMMARSKJÖLD GOES TO CHINA

Hammarskjöld stepped into the breach, his path strewn with diplomatic mines. We should bear in mind that Hammarskjöld’s mission had three major structural constraints. Firstly, the PRC had recently been at war with the UN, of which it was not yet a member-state. Secondly, Hammarskjöld was mediating a crisis between two great powers with no diplomatic relations. Most crucially, his mandate was vulnerable to Cold War pressures.

In this section, drawing on overlooked declassified documents, I argue that we should see Hammarskjöld’s mission as important to the peaceful outcome of this crisis. Without ever saying so explicitly, Hammarskjöld was trying to prevent a U.S.-China war. In the overall dissertation, this case study picks up where the last one left off. Sir Edward Grey, as we saw, argued that he stood stripped of choice in 1914.

This case study further demonstrates that, even within the narrowest constraints, leaders always have choices. Mao, Zhou, Chiang, Eisenhower and Dulles all set the region on the path to war in 1954. Two of those actors pulled back in time to avert it. They were helped by a largely forgotten actor. Without Hammarskjöld, those leaders might later have written memoirs, like Grey, riddled with fatalistic self-justifications based on their alleged lack of choice to prevent war.

The UN resolution endorsing Hammarskjöld’s diplomatic mission was a poisoned chalice, since it condemned China in one paragraph while also calling for negotiations. A Chinese rejection would damage the UN’s credibility and bolster hawks in the U.S. who were advocating military strikes against China, “despite all the risks of general war these would entail.”³¹ Hammarskjöld decided that he would act on the basis of the UN Charter, which the PRC recognised, rather than the harsh resolution.³² He cabled a blunt message to the PRC’s foreign minister, Zhou Enlai, practically inviting himself to Beijing.³³ A reply came seven days later: “In the interest of peace and relaxation of international tension, I am prepared to receive you in our capital, Peking, to discuss with you

²⁷ *Ibid.* 40.

²⁸ FRUS (1954: 438). The last number in these references is not a page number, but corresponds to the document number in the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) archives.

²⁹ Miller (1962: 36).

³⁰ *Ibid.* 40

³¹ Cordier and Foote (1972: 418).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

pertinent questions.”³⁴ Hammarskjöld felt he had to “crash the gate”, according to one cable, and “try to find [a] method divorced from limelight...in such form as not to commit either [Beijing] or Washington.”³⁵ He saw himself as the “only emissary acceptable” to both China and the U.S. He thus couched his invitation in a form that “[made] it impossible” for China to refuse.³⁶ To cultivate U.S. support, Hammarskjöld had warned U.S. Ambassador Lodge of his intentions two days before sending his cable to Zhou.³⁷ Hammarskjöld was pleased by Zhou’s tone, which he considered “very courteous” and “not contentious”.³⁸ Lodge expressed confidence in Hammarskjöld’s “ability to play his hand in his own way.”³⁹ For good measure, Hammarskjöld also informed the Soviet ambassador of his mission.

Fully aware of the U.S.-China propaganda war at play, Hammarskjöld boldly told the American government not to “tell him lies.”⁴⁰ The Cold War created immense protocol issues at the UN, putting tight constraints on the Secretary-General’s room for manoeuvre.⁴¹ One false step and Hammarskjöld would forfeit his impartiality, if not that of the UN. For symbolic effect, Hammarskjöld took his American bodyguard with him, to avoid the Chinese leaders thinking that he was “kowtowing”. To reinforce the point, he also asked for a U.S. Government airplane to start his journey.⁴² For now, Hammarskjöld enjoyed full American support; behind the scenes, the U.S. went to great lengths to avoid any actions likely to embarrass or endanger his mission.⁴³

Having established contact with Zhou, and shored up American support, Hammarskjöld’s third step was to manage the media. On 18 December, he answered the press with evasive double-speak. When asked whether he had “any real suggestion how to ease the tension in the Far East,” Hammarskjöld stressed that bringing preconceived ideas to a negotiation would risk sacrificing his own flexibility.⁴⁴ Although opaque, his answer did not deny that his mission was linked to the Taiwan Strait crisis. During his last press conference before his trip, he said that his mission was “not negotiation, and it is not a goodwill mission.”⁴⁵ Defining his mission in the vaguest possible terms may have helped him to retain his flexibility. One journalist asked him whether it was not humiliating, as the head of the UN, recently at war with China, to now “kneel” before Zhou Enlai to beg for the release of American pilots. “I am not going anywhere to beg anyone for anything,” he

³⁴ Cited in *Ibid.* 423.

³⁵ FRUS (1954: 454).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ FRUS (1954: 437).

³⁸ FRUS (1954: 449).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ FRUS (1954: 433).

⁴¹ FRUS (1954: 561), FRUS (1954: 562), FRUS (1954: 487), FRUS (1953: 213).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ For example, FRUS (1954: 976) and FRUS (1955: 5).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 427.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 431.

replied firmly.⁴⁶ Asked whether he might be willing to discuss other matters while on his trip, Hammarskjöld evasively questioned the semantics of the word “discuss”.⁴⁷ Clearly, he was leaving his options open.

Arriving in Beijing on 5 January, Hammarskjöld dined with Zhou and watched an opera. The next day, he began his marathon series of meetings: the pair spoke for over fourteen hours in four days, with an average of three hours per meeting.⁴⁸ They focussed on the captured American pilots, their conviction on spying charges, and the possibility of their release. They also dealt with Sino-American bilateral issues. From the outset, Hammarskjöld positioned himself not as the mouthpiece of the UN or the U.S., “which would have made me a party to the conflict.”⁴⁹ Instead, the Secretary-General claimed to speak on behalf of all the weight of world opinion which his office carried. Hammarskjöld stressed to Zhou “the vital importance of [the pilots’] fate to the cause of peace.”⁵⁰ Here is a concrete expression of Hammarskjöld’s recognition, largely tacit but fairly evident in the transcript of their talks, that his action was aimed at more than the release of the prisoners. Having made this explicit linkage, the Secretary-General strengthened the connection:

You may feel that I exaggerate: how can the fate of these men be of such significance? However, I know that I am not exaggerating. This case is one of those which history suddenly lifts up to key significance...it has brought me around the world in order to put before you, in great frankness and trusting that we see eye to eye on the desperate need to avoid adding to existing frictions, my deep concern *both as Secretary-General and as a man*.⁵¹

Hammarskjöld revealed two important points. Firstly, he was subtly tying the fate of the prisoners to the fate of peace in the Taiwan Strait. Secondly, Hammarskjöld made a fine yet powerful distinction between his office and his person in the resounding phrase “as Secretary-General and as a man”. This distinction, as we will see, was crucial in allowing Zhou Enlai to save face in the de-escalation of this crisis.

It soon became clear that Zhou and Hammarskjöld agreed on none of the details. The Chinese premier noted that they “were not even using the same language.”⁵² This led Zhou to conclude that they would be unable to find a solution “without approaching the matter from the angle of general political questions.”⁵³ The next day, Zhou repeated his desire to discuss the broader Taiwan crisis. Peaceful coexistence was only possible if the U.S. withdrew from Taiwan.⁵⁴ On the third day, the Secretary-General finally broached the Taiwan crisis. Zhou feared that the UN was dominated by

⁴⁶ Cordier and Foote (1972: 433).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cordier and Foote (1972: 436-437).

⁴⁹ Cited in Froehlich (2008: 138).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Cited in *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.* 139.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 140.

the U.S.⁵⁵ He complained of the U.S.-ROC mutual defence treaty, seeing in it evidence that the United States was strengthening Chiang's army so that it could attack the mainland."⁵⁶ Hammarskjöld used this opening to hold up the mirror to Zhou Enlai.

"Many of the words you used with such deep conviction in describing your fear of aggression I have heard used in other countries concerning you," Hammarskjöld replied. "You may seem to have substantial reasons for your fear, but so have others for theirs."⁵⁷ He used the analogy of the opera they had watched earlier as an example of the current crisis. In the opera, he said "two men were fighting each other in the dark, each of them believing that he had been threatened by the other man." For this "tragedy of errors" to be broken, he argued, "somebody must begin, somewhere." In effect, Hammarskjöld was inviting Zhou to release the pilots as a token of good faith. He emphasised that he was in favour of the PRC joining the UN.⁵⁸

The final sessions ended with no firm promise from the Chinese leadership. However, they had reached a basic understanding. Hammarskjöld agreed to represent China's views on the broader Taiwan crisis to American leaders. In return, Zhou would consider granting more lenient sentences to the pilots, and hinted at a potential future release. The main condition would be that the U.S. refrain from bellicose threats against China. Despite their lack of agreement on the case, the Secretary-General was confident that their mutual respect paved the way for China's unilateral release of the pilots.⁵⁹ Zhou reciprocated with an expression of China's admiration for Hammarskjöld's commitment to peace.⁶⁰

The result of Hammarskjöld's 'Peking formula' strategy was still up in the air. Before his trip, he had called his trip to Beijing "one of the most extraordinary experiments in modern diplomacy."⁶¹ On his return, he was even more elated. He described it as "a miracle that everything went well, because the risks we were taking were extraordinary; but it did— in every detail."⁶² Hammarskjöld was not speaking about the release of the prisoners, which of course he had not yet secured. He alluded instead to his meeting of the minds with Zhou. His conversations with the latter had

made an enormous impression on me, and I would wish that other policy-makers had got it. What is so appalling is the basic lack of realism as to assumptions on which very much of Western policy is built. And now I am thinking not only of the situation in China, but of China's role in Asia and of the position of the present regime in Peking. It is a little bit humiliating when I have to say that Zhou Enlai to me appears as the most superior brain I have so far met in the field of foreign politics.⁶³

⁵⁵ Corder and Foote (1972: 438).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 439.

⁵⁷ Froehlich (2008: 140).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 141.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 142.

⁶¹ See *Ibid.* 216.

⁶² *Ibid.* 224.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Overlooking Zhou's role and personal qualities, he thought, "is likely to lead to disaster."⁶⁴ Hammarskjöld had brought back not so much a deal, as a more nuanced understanding of China. President Eisenhower was well known for his stereotypical view of all Asians as wily Orientals.⁶⁵ Having exposed Zhou to the American view in Beijing, Hammarskjöld now hoped to achieve a comparable result in the U.S.

WAR SCARE

Stepping off the plane, the Secretary-General felt that his "feet hardly touched the ground. I had a good story to tell, but couldn't tell it!"⁶⁶ In order not to harm his fragile understanding with Zhou, he avoided the media.⁶⁷ Hammarskjöld had kept Dulles in the loop over the phone during his talks in China, including the linkage between the pilots and the Taiwan Strait crisis.⁶⁸ But the winds were blowing against Hammarskjöld.

On his second day in Beijing, Dulles had already assembled a team of advisers to discuss options if Hammarskjöld failed. Some of the actions U.S. officials debated included "overflights, mining of harbors, and bombing of railroads."⁶⁹ Each of these could easily be construed as acts of war. When discussants brought up this point, Dulles simply remarked that he did "not think that the Chinese Communists want war."⁷⁰ This was a dangerous assumption. Dulles ultimately favoured the UN route (*Oracle*), but kept the other options on the table. President Eisenhower did not think the American public was ready to go to war yet.⁷¹ I will now explore the origins of a major war scare in March 1955. I will argue that Washington's negative assessment of Hammarskjöld's mission helps to explain this sudden escalation.

Back in the U.S., Hammarskjöld was "moderately optimistic" that Zhou would agree to the prisoners' release, as long as the issue was publicly divorced from the crisis.⁷² "One of the most significant statements Hammarskjöld made," the American ambassador in Tokyo noted, "was that Chou appeared in private conversations to be a very worried man."⁷³ Over time, Zhou had stopped invoking Communist propaganda clichés, and became "more human".⁷⁴ Hammarskjöld had brought back photos of the captured pilots, who were safe. He had secured a promise that the families of the pilots would be given visas to visit them in China. Of the two pilots the PRC knew were CIA

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ See Brands (1988: 130).

⁶⁶ Cited in Froehlich (2008: 147).

⁶⁷ Cited in Corder and Foote (1972: 436).

⁶⁸ FRUS (1955: 5).

⁶⁹ FRUS (1955: 4).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² FRUS (1955: 7).

⁷³ "Chou" is an antiquated transliteration of Zhou's name from the Mandarin Chinese.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

agents, Zhou noted that, although they deserved the death sentence, they would come home one day. The Chinese foreign minister had said that “he definitely wanted the possibility of releasing the prisoners but it must be in such a way as not to make him lose face in Asia”. Hammarskjöld was convinced of Zhou’s good faith, and advised the U.S. to “lie low” and avoid inflaming tensions. Zhou’s main grievance related to concerns about details of the U.S.-Taiwan alliance, which he feared might include territorial designs on mainland China.⁷⁵ Hammarskjöld was now holding up the mirror to U.S. leaders.

On his way home from China, Hammarskjöld had requested a meeting in order to brief the U.S. president.⁷⁶ President Eisenhower turned down Hammarskjöld’s request; he would meet Dulles instead.⁷⁷ When they met, Dulles “didn’t feel very happy” about what he heard.⁷⁸ His impression was that “Hammarskjöld had made no progress at all.”⁷⁹ Dulles now openly considered giving the ROC a secret guarantee to defend the contested offshore islands. He was also working on persuading Chiang to withdraw ROC forces from those islands under U.S. naval escort. When a British colleague asked him if such an escort risked war with the PRC, Dulles said that “if we were shot at we would obviously shoot back.”⁸⁰ Diminishing faith in Hammarskjöld’s mission inclined the U.S. toward more muscular action.

A few days later, Dulles predicted the failure of Hammarskjöld’s mission.⁸¹ He announced the president’s intention to request congressional authorisation to use the armed forces in the Taiwan Strait. “In my mind,” he announced, “the risk of war is greater if we don’t take this action.”⁸² Lastly, Dulles informed the ROC Foreign Minister that the president had agreed, that very morning, that the United States would defend Quemoy and Matsu islands.⁸³ This secret guarantee included a “preparedness to act against the mainland” if conflict escalated.⁸⁴ This demonstrates that Zhou’s fears, which Hammarskjöld had reported, were well founded.

From Taipei, the hawkish Ambassador Karl Rankin consistently undermined U.S. support for Hammarskjöld. Rankin spread the rumour that Hammarskjöld had sold out Taiwan by bartering the evacuation of the Dachen islands in return for the pilots’ release.⁸⁵ This was pure conjecture, but it confirmed Dulles’ unfounded opinion that Hammarskjöld had failed. The ROC ambassador to the

⁷⁵ FRUS (1955: 11).

⁷⁶ FRUS (1955: 7).

⁷⁷ FRUS (1955: 13).

⁷⁸ FRUS (1955: 18).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ FRUS (1955: 22).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ FRUS (1955: 28).

⁸⁴ FRUS (1955: 27).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

UN also spread this rumour on the day Hammarskjöld left for China.⁸⁶ The Secretary-General noticed the hardening mood in Washington. The U.S. had publicly rebuffed Zhou's offer to allow the pilots' families to visit China, deeming it a propaganda move.⁸⁷ In an extraordinarily blunt move on 27 January, Hammarskjöld wrote Dulles a letter virtually accusing him of burning "a possible bridge to solutions". Hammarskjöld further cast doubt on the success of any UN action through the Security Council, accusing the U.S. of using *Oracle* as a propaganda exercise, which it was.⁸⁸ He continued:

In view of *the vital importance of this whole issue to peace*, and more specifically to the United Nations efforts to achieve peace, I would, under all the circumstances, have regarded it as natural if some contact had been established with the Secretary-General. As matters now stand, when the Secretary-General has a more direct impression of the Chinese aspect of the problem than anybody else in the West....⁸⁹

Hammarskjöld was stressing the direct linkage of the release of the pilots to peace in the Taiwan Strait, accusing *Washington* of endangering peace. Dulles replied in a brief statement essentially referring Hammarskjöld to lower-level officials.⁹⁰ Curtly, Dulles told Hammarskjöld that the General Assembly had not mandated him to tie "other issues" into his mission to China.⁹¹ The message was clear. The broader Taiwan crisis was not his business. The U.S. government did not appreciate Hammarskjöld conveying the fact that Zhou had linked the pilots' release to the issue of peace in the current crisis.⁹² As Pang Yang Huei noted, "the US found Hammarskjöld to have taken his job too seriously."⁹³ His initiative, and China's positive reaction to it, now made the U.S. appear obstructionist. Dulles felt that the Secretary-General's mission had left Washington "in a mess", and he was so "mad" that he did "not know what to say to H."⁹⁴ Dulles was irritated that Hammarskjöld was broadcasting his "belief that Chou is a reasonable human being."⁹⁵ Ambassador Lodge stoked Dulles' anger by claiming that Hammarskjöld was "way over his head" and suffered from "delusions of grandeur."⁹⁶ Lodge tried to deter Hammarskjöld from going on any more "personal excursions" with Zhou.⁹⁷ The qualified faith American officials had in Hammarskjöld's mission evaporated. The U.S. was gearing up for war.

⁸⁶ FRUS (1954: 460).

⁸⁷ This turned out to be a major mistake. As Lipsey recounts, "Hammarskjöld felt intuitively that the prisoners might well be released to accompany their family members home—an intuition confirmed months later, after the fact, by a Polish diplomat with inside knowledge of Chinese intentions." Lipsey (2013: 223).

⁸⁸ FRUS (1955: 38).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ FRUS (1955: 53).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Huei (2011: 153).

⁹³ *Ibid.* 154.

⁹⁴ Cited in *Ibid.* 154.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 156.

⁹⁶ In *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 156

Early 1955 was a turning point in the crisis. On 18 January, the PLA staged an amphibious assault on the ROC-held islands. Yijiangshan Island fell two days later, with half of the 1,000 ROC troops killed, the other half taken prisoner. In late January, the U.S. Congress granted the president the right to use force to defend Taiwan.⁹⁸ Although the resolution did not explicitly mention the offshore islands, Zhou saw this as “a war message.”⁹⁹ China was not afraid and would fight for Taiwan, Zhou warned the U.S.¹⁰⁰ President Eisenhower authorised the use of force against mainland Chinese bases in the event of war. The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the air force to begin urgent target selection for an “enlarged atomic offensive” against the PRC.¹⁰¹ By February, Dulles was convinced that war was “a question of time rather than a question of fact,” and believed that it would quickly go nuclear.¹⁰² He hoped that there would be enough time for the administration to help “to create a better public climate for the use of atomic weapons.”¹⁰³ Towards that end, the Eisenhower administration appears to have deliberately attempted to prepare the public for nuclear war by fomenting a full-blown war-scare in March.¹⁰⁴ The war talk reached a crescendo in the American media when a senior military official was quoted, in front-page news, warning of a military showdown over Quemoy and Matsu islands on April 15.¹⁰⁵ Against this backdrop, the U.S. supported policies which provided two plausible triggers of immediate war.

Firstly, the U.S. administration’s war scare, which its own officials encouraged, led Eisenhower and Dulles to concoct a secret plan to defend Taiwan. President Eisenhower endorsed an immediate naval blockade five hundred miles in length along China’s coast. He also agreed to the stationing of nuclear weapons on Taiwan to deter a PRC invasion.¹⁰⁶ In mid-April, Eisenhower dispatched Radford and Robertson – two well-known hawks – to Taipei carrying the president’s plan. Radford understood that the plan he was proposing to Chiang “meant war” with China.¹⁰⁷ In a dramatic twist, *Chiang* rejected the plan out of hand.

He no longer trusted the U.S.¹⁰⁸ The irony is that the U.S. was, just as Eisenhower had joked of Chiang a few months earlier, in the hands of “a fellow who hasn’t anything to lose.”¹⁰⁹ But when

⁹⁸ Brands (1988: 138-139).

⁹⁹ Cited in *Ibid.* 139.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 141.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 142.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Dulles stated publicly that the U.S. was prepared to use nuclear weapons; a young Richard Nixon opined that nuclear weapons were now conventional; and Eisenhower concurred that the atomic bomb could be used like “a bullet or anything else” in wartime. Admiral Radford began advocating pre-emptive strikes against the PRC’s airbases in order to avoid another Pearl Harbour. *Ibid.* 142-143.

¹⁰⁵ Accinelli (1990: 339).

¹⁰⁶ Chang and Di (1993: 1519).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 1520.

¹⁰⁸ Chiang was particularly distrustful because – prior to the crisis – the U.S. had encouraged the ROC to fortify and defend the Dachen islands against Chinese attacks. In February, however, the U.S. had reversed its policy and pressured Chiang to withdraw from the islands. Chang and Di (1993: 1519), Matsumoto (1988: 86-87).

¹⁰⁹ See Chang (1988: 105).

Eisenhower gave Chiang a blank cheque to provoke a U.S.-China war – and with U.S. military backing for his planned invasion of mainland China. But Chiang refused to fill it out and cash it in. I will return to this anecdote in the analysis below, as it is a pivotal moment revealing the immense influence which one individual can exert over historical events.

A second U.S.-sponsored event could feasibly have involved the country in a direct war with mainland China. On April 11, an Indian airplane carrying diplomatic delegates and journalists to a conference in Bandung, Indonesia, crashed into the sea, killing most of the people on board. Zhou Enlai was meant to be on the plane, but changed his flight plans citing an emergency appendectomy. This was an assassination attempt on the Chinese premier, carried out by Taiwan's secret service using CIA technology.¹¹⁰ This incident is all the more extraordinary when it becomes clear what Zhou was about to announce at the diplomatic conference. His death might have inflamed tensions to the point of war. This point, which I also return to below, demonstrates the inherent contingency of history.

THE UNRAVELLING

Around the same time as Radford and Robertson arrived on their mission in Taiwan, Premier Zhou spoke at the Bandung conference in Indonesia, having arrived safely by another route. He supported “the settlement of disputes between the United States and China by peaceful means,” and hoped thereby to ensure “the postponement and prevention of a world war.”¹¹¹ These words almost instantly deflated the danger of war in the Taiwan Strait. Some have suggested that Zhou's remarks appear to have been largely improvised, and they originated in a private luncheon with Asian delegates, at which they asked him about the current crisis.¹¹² Dulles later took the credit for exerting influence, via diplomatic proxies, to pressure Zhou to make a peaceful gesture to decrease tensions over Taiwan.¹¹³ However, the credit belongs to Zhou himself, and second of all to Hammarskjöld, whose influence was at work. While Dulles did exert influence, the original idea and effort appear to have been Hammarskjöld's.

Dulles ordered the covert U.S. diplomatic campaign on 8 April.¹¹⁴ Hammarskjöld had begun much earlier. In February, despite Dulles' attempt to tie his hands, Hammarskjöld had secured a proposal from Zhou to negotiate directly with the U.S.¹¹⁵ Dulles turned down the offer.¹¹⁶ Despite growing U.S. impatience, Hammarskjöld persevered. In a meeting on 24 March with U.S.

¹¹⁰ Some sources argue that Zhou knew of the plot, and delayed his departure – without warning those on the plane – in order to escape unscathed. See Lipsey (2013: 228).

¹¹¹ Cited in Huei (2011: 175).

¹¹² Chang and Di (1993: 1521).

¹¹³ See Brands (1988: 144-145).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 145, footnote 78.

¹¹⁵ Chang and Di (1993: 1521).

¹¹⁶ See Accinelli (1990: 341).

Ambassador Lodge, Hammarskjöld hinted that he was working behind the scenes to influence the outcome of the conference. As Lodge summed up, Hammarskjöld “feels Chou is clever enough to realize that *he will be queried in private discussions there by friends of US and UN* about his attitude on the prisoners.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, he had already been working to pressure Indian diplomats and leaders to convey this to Zhou. Hammarskjöld simultaneously pressured the U.S. to abstain from provocative statements.¹¹⁸ Dulles agreed to support Hammarskjöld’s campaign of “quiet diplomacy” until the end of April.¹¹⁹ Although he never acknowledged it, Dulles’ own behind-the-scenes efforts to influence the Bandung conference took their lead from the UN Secretary General.

Following Bandung, Hammarskjöld continued his *demarche* despite U.S. impatience.¹²⁰ To Dulles’ credit, he had already sent several signals of good faith to the PRC.¹²¹ Dulles remained scathing, telling foreign diplomats that Hammarskjöld had “not done a good job.”¹²² In an indirect compliment, however, Dulles noted that although numerous states had extended their good offices to resolve the crisis peacefully, none could match the disinterestedness of the UN.¹²³ Despite his dislike of Hammarskjöld, Dulles secretly helped him by confronting the Indian ambassador, Krishna Menon, who maintained a competing channel of negotiation with Zhou.¹²⁴ Hammarskjöld probably never learned of this exchange, but he would have been pleased. Menon opportunistically took credit publicly for the release of the first U.S. pilots in May 1955; Hammarskjöld had quietly avoided public criticism of this impostor.¹²⁵ In hindsight, Dulles regained confidence in Hammarskjöld’s work.¹²⁶

The news of the final release of all captured U.S. pilots came on 29 July 1955, Hammarskjöld’s birthday, while he was holidaying with his family in Sweden. This was no coincidence. The Chinese embassy had apparently enquired what he would like for his birthday.¹²⁷ Zhou’s message stressed that “this release takes place in order to maintain friendship with Hammarskjöld and has no connection with the UN resolution. Zhou Enlai expresses the hope that Hammarskjöld will take note of this point.”¹²⁸ *The New York Times* and other newspapers framed the release as a symptom of the warming U.S.-China relationship, omitting Hammarskjöld’s role entirely.¹²⁹ This did not bother him, but he nevertheless received congratulations privately, and Dulles apparently respected

¹¹⁷ Emphasis added. FRUS (1955: 166).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ FRUS (1955: 186).

¹²⁰ FRUS (1955: 238) and (1955: 255).

¹²¹ FRUS (1955: 113) and (1955: 187).

¹²² FRUS (1955: 243).

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ See the extraordinary exchange in FRUS (1955: 283).

¹²⁵ Lipsey (2013: 229-232).

¹²⁶ FRUS (1955: 305).

¹²⁷ Lipsey (2013: 232-233).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 233.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

him thereafter.¹³⁰ What the newspapers, and modern accounts of the crisis, missed is that Hammarskjöld's mission was not merely a sideshow, but a major contribution to the prevention of a U.S.-China war.

ANALYSIS

We now return to the philosophical purpose of this dissertation: to examine the role individual agents play in preventing war. This section discusses three key points. Firstly, I return to the three agents whose actions contributed to the prevention of war: Hammarskjöld, Zhou and Chiang. Secondly, I return to the failed attempt on Zhou's life which, I argue, was a potential Sarajevo moment. I make this case by arguing that Zhou's premature death might have escalated U.S.-China tensions to the point of war. Finally, I argue that methodological individualism is the most persuasive level of analysis at which to understand the causes of war and its prevention. I also deal with two structural critiques which might downplay the role that agents played in preventing war.

Dulles later claimed that the U.S. administration had prevented war by threatening it.¹³¹ Historians were initially sympathetic to this view; but more recent evidence belies this claim. Today, the scholarly consensus is that Eisenhower and Dulles brought the U.S. close to war with China by unnecessarily escalating the crisis.¹³² Moreover, their use of nuclear threats in 1955 apparently convinced Mao of the need to develop China's own nuclear weapons programme, to effectively guard against such threats in the future.¹³³ This crisis was an important example of great powers pulling back from the brink of war. However, scholars have not challenged the U.S.-centric focus of accounts of this crisis. This is an understandable bias in the Cold-War-era literature. Newly-declassified evidence, I have argued, reveals the important roles of a plethora of other actors, including UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, Premier Zhou Enlai and the Taiwanese leader Chiang Kai-shek, among others. I will now argue that all three played major roles in preventing the use of force.

If judged in absolute terms, Hammarskjöld's effort to prevent war failed. Armed clashes occurred between PRC and ROC forces, as we saw. Moreover, crises again erupted in the Taiwan Strait in 1958 and 1993. The underlying conflict remains unresolved in 2014. Granted, Hammarskjöld was no superman. However, this black-or-white framework is ill-suited to weighing the causal efficacy of agents in a world which is mostly grey. Preventive diplomacy, as we defined it, only aims to tackle specific crises as they arise. It is unfair to judge Hammarskjöld's efforts against the benchmark of resolving a conflict for all time, were that even possible. We are more

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ See Brands (1988: 147).

¹³² Chang (1988: 98-99).

¹³³ *Ibid.* 121.

interested in weighing the effect of his efforts in preventing the escalation of this crisis to a U.S.-China war in 1955, which was a clear and ominous danger. Judged according to that criterion, Hammarskjöld's mission proved immensely successful.

It is impossible to prove categorically that Secretary-General Hammarskjöld's efforts in the crisis tilted the balance from potential war to peace. What is certain is that his quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts had a much more important effect than most accounts suggest. This bias may be partly due to the Eisenhower administration's self-congratulation, Dulles' dislike of Hammarskjöld, and the subsequent U.S.-centric accounts of the crisis. Hammarskjöld never published an account of the incident, or claimed any credit for the de-escalation of the crisis. However, tellingly, and probably sincerely, Dulles later came close to acknowledging Hammarskjöld's important role during the Taiwan Strait Crisis.¹³⁴ Hammarskjöld contributed to preventing war in at least two important ways. In the first instance, although he was not the only potential mediator in the crisis, he was the most impartial. For the worst days of the crisis, the Secretary-General was the only indirect channel of communication between the U.S. and China, and helped both understand the other's fears. Secondly, Hammarskjöld's most effective move was also his simplest: humanising Zhou, and assessing that he was searching for a way to deescalate. Hammarskjöld's psychological assessment that Zhou appeared to be a worried man was prescient, since the crisis partly reflected internal Chinese political tensions, as we will now see.

Hammarskjöld's actions did not suffice to prevent war. In 1839, General Scott had held open the door to a peaceful compromise, but Harvey and Fairfield had to walk through it. Similarly, Hammarskjöld only held the door open to compromise. Like any go-between, he was not the most decisive actor. Ironically, the belligerents – the leaders of the ROC and PRC – appear to have decided against further escalation, seemingly independently of one another. *Zhou* and *Chiang* arguably prevented a major war in 1955. It was largely Zhou's actions which ended the Taiwan Strait crisis peacefully.¹³⁵ Domestically, it was also Zhou who cemented political support for peace by radically advocating for the *peaceful* reintegration of Taiwan in July 1955. Peace was only restored when Zhou gained Mao's consent and the support of political elites.¹³⁶ This suggests the potential tragedy of Zhou's assassination, which I explore below. Therefore, ultimate credit for the prevention of war must go to the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, as well as to his enemy, Chiang Kai-shek.

The moment in which two U.S. envoys presented Chiang with a blank cheque to provoke a war is one of those which history throws up to significance. Nothing in Chiang's character or policy preference predisposed him to reject the plan. Indeed, the U.S. president was outsourcing to Chiang

¹³⁴ FRUS (1957: 88).

¹³⁵ Sheng (2008).

¹³⁶ Jian (2001: 170-171).

the decision to launch an aggressive war to reconquer mainland China, backed by U.S. guarantees and nuclear weapons. That Chiang refused, due to his distrust of the U.S., was either wise or lucky. The case of July 1914 offers a stark parallel which demonstrates the decisive importance of agency. In 1914, as we saw, Berchtold sought and received an infamous blank cheque from the German leadership to attack Serbia. In 1955, Chiang Kai-Shek received a similar commitment from the U.S., and every incentive imaginable to cash it in. Unlike Berchtold, however, Chiang decided not to. This was lucky, but it was not due to luck that the U.S. and China avoided war in 1955. It was due to one individual's decision.

This case study demonstrated at least one major contingent event upon which history hinged. The failed Taiwanese assassination attempt provides the premise for a counter-factual scenario which, arguably, suggests how close the U.S. and China came to war. Let us imagine that, instead of having an emergency appendectomy – or being tipped off – Zhou had boarded the plane he had initially booked for his upcoming trip to Bandung. Almost as soon as his plane crashed, rumours of foul play would have swirled around the world. Even if his intelligence services failed to unveil the Taiwanese plot, Mao, distrustful as he was, may have laid the blame squarely on Washington for the actions of its client state. This, feasibly, would have added a major stressor in the crisis, with unpredictable consequences. Presumably, Washington would have denied any culpability, and may even have alleged that Mao had orchestrated this ‘false flag’ attack to justify an invasion of Taiwan. In this new crisis, Chiang might have accepted the secret U.S. security guarantees after all. Or Mao, his fears sharpened by the death of Zhou Enlai, might finally have ordered the invasion of Taiwan.

The above counter-factual argument reveals the causal role which specific individuals played in preventing the resort to the use of force in 1955. This case study, like the previous ones, has once again substantiated the broader argument of this dissertation: that individuals, not structural forces beyond their control, cause and prevent wars. This specific case study may inspire counter-arguments. One such argument is that the U.S. and China were not *really* close to war in 1955. The implication is that, whatever individual agents did – and no matter how much they exerted themselves – it did not causally determine the outcome of the crisis. Most accounts stress that the outbreak of a U.S.-China war was a looming possibility. However, Pang Yang Huei provides a dissenting view. He argues that the U.S. war scare was primarily for domestic consumption, and did not increase the risk of war.¹³⁷ From this perspective, both the PRC and the U.S. “demonstrated flexibility as they inched towards [de-escalation] with the intention to tacitly resolve the Taiwan Strait Crisis.”¹³⁸ This argument is original, but downplays the fact that numerous U.S. officials

¹³⁷ See Huei (2011: 179-180).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 179.

advocated war with China in *internal* discussions.¹³⁹ Moreover, this argument also assumes that China and the U.S. exerted a level of control over the crisis, which they did not.¹⁴⁰ A series of events in early 1955 appeared to make war imminent.

Firstly, Operation *Oracle* failed before it ever began, as Hammarskjöld had expected.¹⁴¹ Anthony Eden's efforts to find a peaceful settlement with Zhou behind the scenes also failed.¹⁴² Moreover, Mao had concluded (erroneously) that the U.S. would not go to war over the offshore islands.¹⁴³ He thought that further agitating against the U.S. and Taiwan would not provoke war. As we saw above, the U.S. had already committed to the defence of the islands. Moreover, U.S. leaders similarly assumed (wrongly) that China would not risk a war. When there was a lull in activities in the Taiwan Strait in early March, Dulles again miscalculated, assuming that the PRC was engaged in "a large-scale build up" to attack.¹⁴⁴ "It was this misassessment that led the United States to escalate tensions in mid-March," as Chang and Di note, "and the crisis lurched towards open hostilities."¹⁴⁵ Therefore, the diplomatic context in early 1955, as in 1839, appeared perfectly propitious for a major war. That no such war erupted was not due to a lack of structural causes, but to the actions of a handful of people.

CONCLUSION

This chapter traced the arc of the first Taiwan Strait Crisis, focussing on Dag Hammarskjöld's efforts to release captured U.S. pilots. By inserting himself into the middle of a U.S.-China crisis, the UN Secretary General took a gamble to try to prevent a major war. Zhou Enlai explicitly recognised Hammarskjöld's contribution to peace, while American scholars and policy-makers have generally overlooked it. Whatever the exact effect of his actions in the first Taiwan Strait crisis, this case study gives fascinating insights into agency and contingency in diplomatic efforts to prevent war. It also demonstrates how, despite severe structural constraints, Hammarskjöld could still play an important role. Similarly, Chiang, despite every structural incentive conspiring in favour of a 'yes', said 'no' to a U.S. proposal almost guaranteed to provoke a U.S.-China war. Finally, I made the case that the failed assassination of Zhou was a contingent event upon which peace depended.

¹³⁹ As Chang (1988: 101) notes: "From Washington's vantage point [in early 1955], all-out war for the offshore islands and perhaps Taiwan itself seemed to loom."

¹⁴⁰ To the contrary, one of the major lessons of this crisis, according to Brands (1988: 151), "involves the unanticipated effect in crisis situations of decisions made in other areas for other reasons."

¹⁴¹ Zhou Enlai refused to attend a UN Security Council meeting to discuss New Zealand's draft resolution. Accinelli (1990: 338). For a full account of Operation Oracle, including the role of Britain, the U.S. and New Zealand in this initiative, see Kaufman (2004).

¹⁴² Chang and Di (1993: 1518).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 1515.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 1517

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

This case study provided a useful contrast to the previous chapter on the July crisis. I have already noted one superficial comparison with July 1914: the U.S. blank cheque to Taiwan. This comparison allowed me to tease out the crucial role of agency in determining the outcome of each respective crisis. There is a second and deeper point of comparison regarding what agency and contingency reveal about crises themselves. Had Zhou been successfully assassinated, the parallels with Sarajevo would have been startling. Zhou, like Franz Ferdinand, was a force for moderation in his own government. With that voice gone, one of the strongest brakes on war would have disappeared. However, as I argued in the last chapter, Franz Ferdinand's assassination did not *cause* WWI. Rather, it caused a crisis; the subsequent actions of statesmen, as I argued, caused the war. Similarly, had Zhou died, as I hypothesised, a Sino-American war would still not have been inevitable. It would perhaps have become immeasurably more likely, but not over-determined.

The previous cases suggest an important nuance in how we think about crises in relation to war. This relation is neither linear nor deterministic, since it is mediated by human beings. Crises are *perceptual states* triggered by an unforeseen event, with an element of risk or uncertainty, and in which people feel an urgency to act.¹⁴⁶ A crisis therefore “resides in the person as well as in the situation.”¹⁴⁷ It may appear grossly reductionist to suggest that the 1914 and 1955 crises were partly products of the mind. But they arguably were so, in certain key respects. An analogy helps to clarify this point. Some might see the Sarajevo incident in mechanistic terms, like an explosion unleashing “a power no work of man can oppose.” The imagery is of an uncontrollable stream of events pouring forth, against which resistance would be futile. But this type of imagery only makes sense if we understand that the pressures which leaders perceive are entirely psychological. And, as we saw, some leaders (such as Zhou and Chiang) *have* resisted such pressures where others (such as Tisza) have not. In CHAPTER 8, I discuss why leaders might respond differently under comparable pressures.

This case study undermines the idea that a crisis itself can cause war. A crisis is nothing but a perceptual state shared by many individuals and, even then, not shared equally. The inequality of perceptions and the unknowability of another agent's intentions make crises dangerous. But these factors all reside in individuals' minds. For this reason, I suggest that a more fitting analogy for crises is that of a modified Mexican stand-off. Five armed individuals all raise their weapons at the same time. The danger accentuates each individual's perceived pressure to act, yet the intentions of all the others remain unknown. It is precisely in such a situation that perceptions, and dialogue, matter. In July 1914, crudely put, the Russians, fearing Austrian intentions, cocked their weapons first; the Germans, fearing French and Russian intentions, acted second. Soon, everyone lay

¹⁴⁶ Billings, Milburn and Schaalman (1980: 306).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

bleeding on the floor. This logic also applies to 1955. Zhou Enlai did not perceive war as inevitable, so he did not escalate. American leaders did, but held off temporarily. Had Zhou been assassinated, and Mao taken his place in the crisis, it is likely that he – corroded as he was by fear of American aggression – would have fired first. Hence, the idea that a crisis *itself* causes war is inaccurate. We can explain the outcome of international crises with sole reference to individuals, their relations to each other and their mental states.¹⁴⁸

The next chapter leaves the arena of high statecraft and international crises, and enters the domestic politics of Kenya and its post-electoral violence in 2007-2008. We delve deeper into the question of crises and mental pressures by focussing on a single individual, whose decision – he well knew – would have a major impact on the possibility of ethnic violence. This individual, various primary sources have corroborated, may actually have been threatened to act in a certain way. The follow case therefore tests the limits of agency.

¹⁴⁸ This analogy is still reductionist in that it reduces complex inter-state crises to the mental states of its leaders, which is clearly not always the case. I do not aim, thereby, to revive a ‘great man’ theory of history (see CHAPTER 8). Reality is more complex than this, because every individual with a position of influence in a national government, army or diplomatic corps may potentially affect the direction of a crisis. A soldier, as we saw with James Blunt, may even disobey orders. However, this analogy does capture the dynamism of crises, the irreducible element of human agency, and the inherent unpredictability of another agent’s actions.

Samuel Kivuitu – The Kenyan Electoral Crisis, 2007

“My very personal view is that if Samuel Kivuitu had been willing to stand up and publicly resign and say: ‘this isn’t credible and somebody needs to come in and clean this up’...maybe the violence could have been prevented.”¹

Kenya’s 2007-2008 post-election crisis is a closely studied case of preventive diplomacy.² The brutal inter-ethnic violence which engulfed Kenya following the 2007 presidential elections claimed the lives of over 1,500 people. Over 600,000 people were forced to flee their homes. Law and order broke down completely in parts of the country, as mobs of young men used machetes and stones to kill ethnic rivals. Some UN observers saw in the organised violence in Kenya the shadow of the Rwandan genocide.³ At the height of the crisis, Rwanda’s president publicly mused that he would welcome a military coup to prevent genocide in neighbouring Kenya.⁴ Another group of observers warned that the crisis could “result in a protracted war.”⁵ Kofi Annan’s 2008 mediation therefore helped to prevent escalation of this crisis into full-blown war. Annan’s mission ended widespread violence after a marathon 41 days of mediation, turning Kenyan enemies into “co-conspirators for peace”.⁶ In this sense, Kenya was a major success of preventive diplomacy. But seen from another perspective, it can equally be studied as a failure. Few scholars have asked whether the electoral violence *itself* could have been prevented. This chapter aims to answer this question.

Since Kofi Annan’s mediation of the Kenyan crisis is well-documented,⁷ this chapter does not seek to make an original contribution to this literature. Instead, it focusses narrowly on the actions of one senior bureaucrat by the name of Samuel Kivuitu. Kivuitu usually figures as a secondary character in accounts of this drama; not quite an extra, but not a key protagonist either. Unconventionally, this case puts him at the centre of events, as he actually was in the lead up to the 2007 elections. I will argue that his actions – and inactions – on 30 December 2007 altered the course of the electoral crisis.

This case begins with a brief summary of Kenyan history prior to the 2007 violence. It then turns to Kivuitu’s role. I draw on original interviews with international actors who knew and worked with the late Kivuitu. I seek to demonstrate that Kivuitu strove to prevent electoral violence in the coming elections. He was the central figure in a Western strategy to prevent violence after the elections. In the end, however, he did the opposite of what he promised to do in the event of

¹ Unattributable interview, 15 August 2014.

² The Annan mediation has been claimed as a success of both preventive diplomacy and the responsibility to protect (R2P). See UN (2010), Human Rights Watch (March 2008: 67), Langer (2011: 1-17), Kawamoto (2012: 199-134).

³ Corell (2008).

⁴ Wallis (2008).

⁵ AMANI (2008: 29).

⁶ African Union [AU] (2013, 243).

⁷ This is in large part due to the transparency of the African Union. See Lindenmayer and Kaye (2009) and AU (2013).

electoral rigging. I will analyse the effect which his actions had on the course of the crisis, and provide a counter-factual scenario of what might have been, had he done what he had sworn to do. Through original interviews, I have uncovered that Kivuitu was likely threatened in order to compel him to announce fraudulent election results on 30 December. This chapter therefore adds to our understanding of this crisis, and enriches our discussion of agency by discussing coercion.

BACKGROUND

Kenya gained independence from British rule in 1963. For forty years, the country was a one-party state ruled by the Kenya African National Union (KANU). This continuity gave outsiders the impression of Kenya being a haven of stability and an African “success story”.⁸ In 2007, the *New York Times* diagnosed the cause of violence in Kenya as “an atavistic vein of tribal tension that always lay beneath the surface in Kenya but until now had not produced widespread mayhem.”⁹ Political violence in Kenya undeniably has a strong ethnic component. A land of 41 ethnic groups, Kenya has seen a ‘normalisation’ of ethnocentric violence.¹⁰ The two largest ethnic groups, the Kikuyu and the Luo, had long been economically and politically dominant. The Kikuyu, in particular, were perceived to have benefited unfairly from post-colonial land transfers in the fertile Rift Valley.¹¹ Having fought for the British during the Mau Mau uprising, the Kikuyu were demonised as a wealthy, parasitic and overly-powerful minority.¹² “The end result,” Michael Chege concludes, “was a reinvented history in which the Kikuyu had set themselves up for resentment and retaliation.”¹³ Ethnic grievances did play a role in electoral violence between 1992 and 1993. However, scholars have rebutted the “misguided and inflammatory” theory that Kenya’s 2007 electoral crisis resulted from atavistic “tribal warfare”.¹⁴ Ethnic violence, as Branch and Cheeseman argue, stems from attempts by ruling elites to maintain their power, rather than from ethnic grievances *per se*

Historically, Kenya’s diverse ethnic groups traded with each other, inter-married and co-existed peacefully.¹⁵ Brown convincingly argues that “violence in Kenya is an ethnically defined expression of political conflict. Ethnicity is the medium of political violence, not its cause.”¹⁶ To survive political liberalisation, the KANU regime resorted to a “policy of state informalisation”.¹⁷ Local politicians used armed gangs as political proxies, giving them plausible deniability. Another

⁸ Brown (2003: 69-100).

⁹ Chege (2008: 125).

¹⁰ AU (2013: 10).

¹¹ Brown (2003: 3).

¹² Chege (2008: 134).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Branch and Cheeseman (2008: 3).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1.

contributor to the 2007 violence was a proposed constitutional reform known as *majimboism*, which aimed to devolve power from the central government. Many Kenyans understood this proposal as a euphemism for ‘ethnic cleansing’.¹⁸ For years, government officials had referred to rival ethnic groups as “spots” or “blemishes” which “contaminated” Kenya’s ethnic map.¹⁹ There is further evidence that officials trained and financed ethnic-based militias to hunt rival groups, paying between \$20 and \$40 per head.²⁰ Brown warned, in 2003, that the Kenyan government risked sparking a “localised genocide”.²¹ In this scenario, “spontaneous ethnically motivated attacks across the country” might end up “potentially escaping the control of those who initiated the violence.”²² He was largely right.

At the 2002 elections, a broad-based alliance named the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) had ended KANU’s monopoly on power.²³ For a while NARC, led by President Mwai Kibaki, oversaw impressive economic growth, which masked high-level corruption. However, this inter-ethnic political alliance collapsed when Kibaki failed to honour a Memorandum of Understanding with another constituent party led by Raila Odinga.²⁴ Odinga felt betrayed because he had supported Kibaki’s leadership. His party, nursing the grievance of having been excised from key cabinet posts, soon reformed as the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). The schism between Kibaki and Odinga widened further in the lead-up to the 2007 elections.

Odinga conducted a professional campaign, mobilising Kenya’s enormous youth vote.²⁵ He received a major boost from a first-term U.S. senator named Barack Obama.²⁶ Reacting to the ODM wave, President Kibaki cobbled together the Party of National Unity (PNU) three months before the election.²⁷ During the elections, “ODM was appealing to people’s hearts with passionate reminders of economic exclusion, while the PNU appealed to their minds with dry statistics depicting a promising economic future”.²⁸ Despite the appearance of a normal election, Kenya was no stable democracy. Peter Kagwanja has argued that the collapse of a multi-ethnic consensus sparked “a fierce surge of populism and ethno-nationalism which sowed the seed for the 2008 violence.”²⁹ The ODM’s campaign whipped up existing ethnic grievances.³⁰ A sympathetic national daily, *Standard*,

¹⁸ Kagwanja (2009: 370).

¹⁹ Brown (2003: 5).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Chege (2008: 128).

²⁴ *Ibid.* 129.

²⁵ Cheeseman (2008: 173).

²⁶ Hyman (2008).

²⁷ Chege (2008: 135).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Kagwanja (2009: 372).

³⁰ Chege (2008: 132).

printed anti-Kikuyu articles.³¹ ODM campaigners preached hatred on themes of ‘Kenya against the Kikuyu’.³² The ODM intentionally blurred the distinction between Kikuyus and the Kibaki regime.³³ The PNU retorted by spreading rumours that, if ODM won the election, it would carry out a genocide of Kikuyus.³⁴ But the PNU’s campaign also had “a seamy side that preyed on ethnic fears.”³⁵ In sum, both the PNU and the ODM shamelessly incited ethnic hatred during the election.

Two days before the election, President Kibaki named two High Court judges to a court which was already seen as partisan.³⁶ Public trust in the objectivity of the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) was also at an historical low in 2007. The ECK had long been a servile body, staffed with political appointees loyal to the incumbent government.³⁷ The ECK appeared to be redeeming itself by acting more independently in 2002 and 2005. This was largely due to the integrity of a senior bureaucrat named Kivuitu. However, the trust it enjoyed evaporated when President Kibaki appointed new commissioners to the ECK not long before the 2007 elections. In doing so, the PNU violated a decade-old agreement which required consultation with the opposition.³⁸ The ECK’s credibility suffered again when the President did not renew Chairman Kivuitu’s contract until one month before the elections.³⁹ Consequently, numerous Kenyan observers had lost faith in the ECK at a critical time. The ECK’s commissioners appeared to owe their allegiance to the incumbent president.⁴⁰ This was the background behind the man in charge of the December 2007 elections.

KIVUITU’S MOMENT

Throughout 2007, Kivuitu enjoyed the strong support of major diplomatic players in Nairobi, including the U.S., Britain, UN and electoral management NGOs. They discussed ways to ensure clean elections, and to prevent a repeat of past electoral violence. In March, he met with U.S. ambassador Ranneberger, to whom he confessed his concern that Kibaki’s appointment of new “pet” commissioners risked undermining the ECK.⁴¹ The ECK chairman openly asked Western ambassadors for help to prevent violence in coming elections.⁴² When pressed about his relationship with new appointees in the ECK, his answer that they were “getting on very well” seemed

³¹ *Ibid.* 135

³² Kagwanja (2009: 374).

³³ Cited in *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* 375.

³⁵ Indeed, the U.S. embassy, which monitored hate speech on FM radio and live television shows, saw the PNU as being more responsible for the dissemination of hate speech than the ODM. See Chege (2008: 136) and WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4745_a). The reference code in these WikiLeaks citations consists of the original U.S. diplomatic cable ID.

³⁶ Branch and Cheeseman (2008: 17), KNCHR (2008: 25).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 25.

³⁸ See European Union (2008: 5).

³⁹ KNCHR (2008: 59).

⁴⁰ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

⁴¹ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI1385_a).

⁴² WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI1792_a).

contrived.⁴³ On 25 September, Kivuitu publicly pleaded for peace in the coming elections, condemned politicians for inciting violence.⁴⁴ In October, the ECK carried out a national, televised campaign against electoral violence in 2007. These shocking advertisements featured a victim of such violence saying: “I don’t blame the people who killed my parents; I blame the politician who paid them.”⁴⁵ In a blunt speech, Kivuitu delivered a scathing indictment of enduring corruption.⁴⁶ Finally, in a November meeting, Kivuitu thanked diplomatic officials for being “good friends when we are under pressure.”⁴⁷

While he had hitherto been worried by the risks of violence, Kivuitu was not yet desperate. This changed sometime in November. When he again met the American ambassador, Kivuitu felt under pressure. “I am followed everywhere I go,” he said. But he remained “feisty, determined and upbeat,” despite his worsening cancer.⁴⁸ He complained of efforts by unnamed people to influence him to make unethical decisions. Since he saw himself as protected from government pressure by positive public opinion, Kivuitu remained resolute:

If they make it impossible for me to run a fair election, I will not quietly resign and fade away. No. I will hold a mass meeting in Uhuru Park and explain to all the world why I had to resign.⁴⁹

The American government and other key donor states stood firmly behind Kivuitu, protecting him from dismissal by the Kibaki government (which had not yet renewed his contract). The U.S. was coordinating international support for his reappointment.⁵⁰ Kivuitu was the centre-piece of a U.S. strategy to encourage free and fair elections, and to prevent electoral violence. As the head of the ECK, Kivuitu was deeply concerned by the spectre of ethnic violence at the next elections, and attempted to prevent it. He spoke of new measures that had been put in place to give the ECK – and himself – broad powers to sanction corrupt officers, and to nullify the results of polling stations where rigging occurred.⁵¹ However, Kivuitu’s false optimism may have lulled the U.S. embassy into over-estimating how smoothly the elections would unfurl.⁵² In the event that the government attempted to manipulate the ECK on election day, the U.S. embassy “strongly expect[ed] that

⁴³ The U.S. embassy offers the following explanation for Kivuitu’s two-faced approach: “Kivuitu was far less candid about some of the difficulties facing the ECK, perhaps because of the presence [in their meeting] of the four ‘new commissioners’.” Cited in *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ndegwa and Murimi (2007).

⁴⁵ IREC (2008: 88).

⁴⁶ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4097).

⁴⁷ Interview with diplomat, 12 November 2014.

⁴⁸ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4429).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4435_a).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² One pre-election cable read: “The ECK remains firmly under the control of its Chairman, Samuel Kivuitu. This is a good thing...Kivuitu has skilfully managed the commission and kept public opinion on his side. Kivuitu managed a number of administrative reforms and compromises that augur well for election day success.” WikiLeaks (2007: ID 07NAIROBI4745_a).

Chairman Kivuitu would keep his word to resign in a publicly spectacular fashion if the commission was subverted in this fashion.”⁵³

Kivuitu’s was an authoritative voice at this point in history. He was generally seen, across the country, as a guarantor of the ECK’s independence.⁵⁴ He was practically a “grandfatherly” figure for many Kenyans.⁵⁵ Indeed, Kivuitu was “highly respected and determined to run a clean election.”⁵⁶ His “characteristically frank and critical” style made him one of the rare respected sources in Kenyan officialdom.⁵⁷ Ambassador Ranneberger understood that the ECK chairman’s statement would carry serious weight among public opinion.⁵⁸ With great foresight, the American ambassador predicted what might follow:

The greater danger is if Odinga loses. He and his supporters will be very tempted – even if the Electoral Commission and observers deem the process credible – to declare the election fraudulent and to resort to violence. In that case, there could be significant violence...⁵⁹

Kivuitu’s role was crucial. If he opposed potential rigging, he would invalidate the legitimacy of the election in the eyes of many Kenyan and international observers. If he ratified what was seen as a fraudulent election, this might entice ODM supporters to resort to violence. The U.S. believed Kivuitu’s assurances that he would annul the elections in the case of rigging. Speaking at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) one week before the elections, Samuel Kivuitu put on a brave face. His prognosis was that, this time, elections would run smoothly.⁶⁰ Beneath his calm exterior, however, he was clearly worried.

The 2007 Kenyan elections were watched by hundreds of international observers from the European Union, the American embassy and the International Republican Institute. International observers were complemented by an army of 16,500 Kenyan observers.⁶¹ Election day went fairly smoothly. The EU concluded that, despite a lack of transparency, the ECK administered the election competently – at least *prior* to the tallying stage.⁶² The U.S. embassy praised the “Herculean efforts by the Electoral Commission” for the peaceful and orderly elections.⁶³ But rising tensions were palpable. At several tally centres, the police fired into the air to disperse crowds protesting against alleged tampering. In the Nairobi slum of Kibera, one ECK official worried about potential violence when 5,000 frustrated people had lined up since midnight to vote. In this case, Chairman Kivuitu

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ See ICG (2008: 6).

⁵⁵ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

⁵⁶ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4830).

⁵⁷ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4097).

⁵⁸ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4830)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cited in Branch and Cheeseman (2008: 1).

⁶¹ EU (2008: 3).

⁶² *Ibid.* 1.

⁶³ WikiLeaks (2007: 07NAIROBI4832).

intervened and successfully pacified the situation.⁶⁴ However, as the day progressed, Kivuitu began losing control.

The first ill omen came as the ECK refused an EU electoral expert entry into the tallying centre, despite Kivuitu's clear instructions to grant the observer access.⁶⁵ Next, word spread that some ECK officials in the countryside had turned off their phones; Kivuitu was not able to contact his own staff.⁶⁶ Even more ominously, Kivuitu's *own office line* appeared to be blocked on election day. "Even in my office right now I cannot ring out, but I can receive," he complained at the time.⁶⁷ At such a tense and critical time, Kivuitu made a ground-shaking statement on live television, publicly speculating that his officers were probably busy "cooking results".⁶⁸ The effect of his words was electric. As the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights later concluded, this statement "irreparably damaged any confidence left in those who feared rigging may have taken place."⁶⁹ With mounting evidence of abnormalities, Kivuitu openly confirmed that he himself suspected his officials of rigging the election. He had resolved that, in the event of rigging, he would "resign in a publicly spectacular fashion" to annul the elections. This course of action was a desperate gamble, and it was not assured that it would prevent subsequent violence. However, the contrary course – ratifying rigged elections – was a near-certain path to widespread violence. His next move mattered immensely.

As the ECK delayed releasing presidential results, demonstrators thronged the Kenyan International Conference Centre. When rumours surfaced of "something afoot" occurring at KICC, the British and American ambassadors decided to investigate.⁷⁰ At 1am on Friday night, the ambassadors, escorted by a UNDP official, went "to see what sort of shenanigans were going on there," but were not able to discern anything.⁷¹ One diplomat thought that this move did "cause pause for thought", but that "in the end, the hawks...gave some backbone to those who began to think" about the risks of rigging.⁷² In private meetings with diplomatic officials, Samuel Kivuitu was openly worried, showing diplomats what he thought were electoral documents which had clearly been doctored. Kivuitu appeared "very rattled," and "thought cheating was going on."⁷³ When this diplomat understood that Kivuitu was going to announce a Kibaki win regardless, he feared large-scale violence, and returned to his embassy to put into gear an emergency response.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ EUEOM (2008: 2).

⁶⁶ International Republican Institute [IRI] (2007: 4).

⁶⁷ Cited in AU (2013: 9).

⁶⁸ KNCHR (2008: 27).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Interview with diplomat, 31 October 2014.

⁷¹ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

⁷² Interview with diplomat, 31 October 2014.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The next day, the mood in the tallying centre at KICC was “vocal and threatening”.⁷⁵ When a scuffle broke out, international journalists were expelled from the venue, and the government announced an immediate ban on all live television broadcasts.⁷⁶ At 4:30pm, Chairman Kivuitu attempted to announce the results of the elections – but was interrupted by agitated ODM activists. Kivuitu was rushed out of the conference centre under police escort. In this brief time window, a diplomat rang Kivuitu on his mobile, and said to him:

Look, I’ve got an idea what you’re about to do, and have got, maybe, some feel for the pressure you are under. But don’t feel that you have to do this...if you’re not happy with this process, the international community will support you if you don’t go ahead and announce this result.⁷⁷

Kivuitu replied: “No, I’m sorry. I feel I’ve got to do this.” Twenty minutes later, he declared Kibaki the winner of the elections.⁷⁸ Minutes later, the state-owned television channel, known for its pro-government bias,⁷⁹ broadcast the swearing in of President Kibaki.⁸⁰ ODM officials denounced alleged rigging of the election, and formed a parallel government.⁸¹ Dramatically for the ECK’s credibility, one of its own officers supported Odinga’s rigging charges. The next day, five ECK commissioners called for an independent inquiry.⁸² Kibaki’s inauguration at State House was so hastily arranged that official guests arrived late, and the national anthem was not even played.⁸³ Violence erupted within minutes of the televised ceremony.

ANALYSIS

The above series of events leads us to three inter-related questions about the role of the ECK and Kivuitu personally in the outbreak of electoral violence. Firstly, we must ask whether the ECK – and Kivuitu himself – was guilty of incompetence, corruption or both in the lead up to the election. Secondly, a puzzling but theoretically-rich question is *why* exactly Kivuitu changed his mind? Finally, what would it have changed had Kivuitu resigned, as he had said he would? I will argue that the ECK showed evidence of low-level corruption, as well as gross incompetence. There is clear evidence linking Kivuitu to its incompetence, but none to alleged corruption. Finally, I argue that Kivuitu’s change of mind can be explained, in part, by the pressures and, allegedly, personal threats directed at him to release the results.

⁷⁵ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

⁷⁶ EUEOM (2008: 3).

⁷⁷ Interview with diplomat, 31 October 2014.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ The Kenyan Broadcasting Commission, according to one fact-finding mission, dedicated as much as 76 percent of media coverage to the PNU and its coalition partners during the election. KNCHR (2008: 10).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 27.

⁸¹ UN (2008: 8).

⁸² AU (2013: 9).

⁸³ Cheeseman (2008: 167).

Interviewees who worked with the ECK, and knew Kivuitu personally, are divided on whether the electoral commission was incompetent or politically manipulated in 2007. There are at least three sides to this story. Firstly, one interviewee argued that the ECK broadly-speaking was “acting on good faith” during the crisis, but was constitutionally “toothless” to prevent electoral violence.⁸⁴ While cheating occurred on both the PNU and ODM sides, the ECK itself – and Kivuitu personally – were “really professional.”⁸⁵ This argument is compelling, to an extent. Kivuitu did seek to prevent electoral violence, at one point calling both candidates before the election to urge them to tone down their rhetoric.⁸⁶ However, Kivuitu was frustrated, saying “I can call them, and tell them to stop, but I have no enforcement powers.”⁸⁷ This is certainly true. The ECK, and Kivuitu himself, had very little legal power to impose sanctions on those threatening violence or peddling hate speech. They could only *announce* sanctions. To impose them, the ECK needed to take legal action.⁸⁸ This is the sympathetic version, which sees the ECK and Kivuitu as among the few actors with professional integrity in the corrupt landscape of Kenyan politics.

A second position views the first one as “utter rubbish”, contending that the ECK was incompetent to run a 21st Century election.⁸⁹ The ECK, according to Margie Cook, was simply unwilling to consider the opposition as a serious contender, even when polling showed that it would win. The ECK also failed to take seriously a UN media strategy which aimed to prevent hate speech. “Even though we had a discussion with the ECK,” Cook recounts, “there wasn’t a single allegation that they proceeded to investigate.” Ultimately, this critical argument points to Kivuitu’s incompetence. “He had no experience in an election in the sense of being a competition, as opposed to a process,” she argued, “he was simply out of his depth.” Cook recalls an incident during which she met with Kivuitu, along with the UN country official, and expressed concern that the ECK had no results database weeks out from the election. Kivuitu had only recently returned from cancer treatment in India, and was surprised to find out that this was the case. Kivuitu had clearly lost control of the Commission, Cook argues. One diplomat monitoring the elections had to use a flashlight from his own vehicle to read ballot papers, since the polling station in question had no electricity.⁹⁰

A third allegation is that the ECK was not only incompetent but, at some levels, corrupt. Eyebrows were raised, for example, when the ECK declined an international contract to develop a results database, claiming that it would contract a local business. This never actually took place.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Interview with Michael Yard, 29 August 2014.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ This paragraph drawn from interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

⁹⁰ Interview with diplomat, 31 October 2014.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

This incident fed rumours of corruption within the ECK. “The story got about that Kivuitu had taken a big backhander for the contract, and that’s why it never worked,” one diplomat recounts.⁹² However, this interviewee warned that rumours about corruption were put about in Kenya to discredit people.⁹³ Even if these rumours were false, there were more persuasive signs of political corruption within the ECK. For example, some commissioners later admitted in private conversations that they had not actually been given the final results of the election by the time Kivuitu announced them, and were merely present for “window dressing”.⁹⁴ Even Kivuitu himself, as we saw earlier, had misgivings about the results he was announcing. However, he went ahead and “announced results that had been subject to serious manipulation.”⁹⁵ In contrast, the head of a fact-finding commission found no evidence of corruption at the ECK involving Kivuitu himself. Judge Kriegler concluded that “there was ample support for finding cock-up rather than conspiracy.”⁹⁶

We now have at least three explanations for the ECK’s performance in the electoral crisis: legal impotence, sheer incompetence and corruption. International policy-makers who worked with the ECK, and who knew Kivuitu personally, remain divided on this question. However, these explanations are not mutually-exclusive. The available evidence seems to point to a complex interaction of those causes at various levels. With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that the ECK mismanaged the tallying of the presidential election. After the election, an international investigation critiqued the ECK for its severe bureaucratic weaknesses and for lack of professionalism.⁹⁷ The report pinpointed the ECK as one of the principal institutions responsible for the contestation of the 2007 elections.⁹⁸ It concluded that “one cannot rely on *any figures* from the ECK.”⁹⁹ It is now clear that the ECK was both incompetent and, at some levels, corrupt. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests electoral malpractice did occur under Kivuitu’s nose at the ECK office.¹⁰⁰ Later in the crisis, the U.S. sanctioned high-level individuals within the ECK with U.S. visa restrictions on charges of corruption, election fixing and suspected links to various political parties and the mafia.¹⁰¹ Kivuitu did not figure on that list. His exact role in the 2007 electoral crisis remains one of its mysteries, to which I now turn.

⁹² Interview with diplomat, 31 October 2014.

⁹³ That is the explanation which Kivuitu gave for the rumour, when pressed about it. *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Interview with Judge Johann Kriegler, 15 September 2014.

⁹⁷ The Commission’s wastefulness made the cost of Kenya’s electoral system “exorbitant”, on par with failed or unstable states such as Afghanistan and Cambodia. See Kriegler and Waki Reports (2009: 7, 8).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 35.

¹⁰⁰ The Kriegler Report pointed out the widespread practice of bribery within the ECK. *Ibid.* 29.

¹⁰¹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08NAIROBI420).

As we saw, the U.S. strategy to prevent electoral violence relied on Kivuitu's good faith. When the violence began, Ambassador Ranneberger rationalised that "Kivuitu has only limited authority as head of the ECK."¹⁰² He blamed the ECK's staff for bungling the election, not Kivuitu personally.¹⁰³ As Stephen Brown wrote, donors were no doubt "initially hesitant to disown the body in which they had invested so much."¹⁰⁴ The same could be said of Kivuitu personally. The American embassy at first seemed convinced by Kivuitu's statement that, "if it were up to me, I would not announce the results."¹⁰⁵ The U.S. and other ambassadors had interceded to try to persuade Kivuitu to delay the announcement. The ODM also requested that Western ambassadors pressure Kivuitu to delay the announcement. Kivuitu said he agreed, but only if the government did, effectively deferring to President Kibaki.¹⁰⁶ The U.S. government soon became critical of Kivuitu's "mix of excuses and untruths" in justifying his role in the crisis.¹⁰⁷ In particular, his excuse that he could not have done anything differently must have profoundly disillusioned Ambassador Ranneberger. Kivuitu had promised that, in case of rigging, he would publicly resign to delegitimise the election. Why he did not do so remains unexplained.

In hindsight, Kivuitu justified his actions by producing documents which claimed that he was misinformed that the disputes had been settled at an overnight recount on 29 December.¹⁰⁸ However, this evidence is self-serving. It is feasible that Kivuitu was intentionally left in the dark in *official* correspondence, due to the politicised nature of the ECK. However, Kivuitu could not have failed to learn of the abnormalities of the election results, including turnout rates reaching *115 percent* at certain polling stations.¹⁰⁹ According to an ECK document, Kivuitu *himself* changed such problematic results to the passable figure of 85 percent.¹¹⁰ He also later reported seeing the Chief Justice at State House dressed and waiting to swear in Kibaki before the ECK had even announced the results.¹¹¹ Moreover, as we saw above, Kivuitu was alarmed enough by apparently doctored electoral documents to show them to diplomats. We should ask why Kivuitu acted against his own concerns, or perhaps whether he chose to ignore them under duress.

Kivuitu's second defence was to argue that, even if he knew of the contentious results, he could not have done anything other than read out the electoral results. He absolved himself of responsibility by claiming that he "was pressured into announcing the results by people in State

¹⁰² WikiLeaks (2008: 08NAIROBI13_a).

¹⁰³ WikiLeaks (2008: 08NAIROBI13_a).

¹⁰⁴ Brown (2009: 392).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ WikiLeaks (2008: 08NAIROBI1301_a).

¹⁰⁸ ICG (2008: 7).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Dagne (2008: 3).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

House who God should never have allowed to be born.”¹¹² He maintained that he only did his job, in accordance with the law.¹¹³ But this legalistic argument is misleading, since it negates the actual plan he had resolved to pursue in case of rigging. It may appear unfair to focus on one cast member of a drama – himself not one of the key protagonists. Moreover, the late Kivuitu, who passed away in 2013, cannot defend himself, unlike Kenyan politicians who are still alive, who remain deafeningly silent on their roles and their direct responsibility for the violence. However, we cannot allow Kivuitu’s passing to act as an amnesty for his role in history.

When a Kenyan poet wrote an open letter to Kivuitu asking for an apology, he explained himself in a reply. His arguments allow us to wrestle with his (likely) views more fairly. In the first instance, Kivuitu claimed to have an absolutely clear conscience, and not to have any feelings of regret or personal responsibility for the electoral crisis.¹¹⁴ This is untrue. All interviewees who knew him personally confirm the same fact. After the election, Kivuitu “appeared a broken man,” “looked pretty washed up,” and “stayed at home and appeared to drink a certain amount.”¹¹⁵ Two interviewees confronted him, one in January and the other in February of 2008, about his decision to announce the results. To his first interlocutor, Kivuitu gave information about an alleged attempt to pay off the ECK to change the results.¹¹⁶ Another person asked Kivuitu what was in his mind when he made his decision. Kivuitu replied that he was in a dilemma, and in the end he thought he should get it done and go home and sleep. “But I have never rested since that moment,” he admitted.¹¹⁷ The electoral crisis, one interviewee said, had visibly contributed to his deteriorating health.¹¹⁸ That Kivuitu was so “personally shattered” only makes sense if we understand why “he went along with the show.”¹¹⁹ He had clearly been under serious pressure to announce the election results. “Kivuitu was very much a hostage and felt like that,” one interviewee noted.¹²⁰ But perhaps he was only a broken man because he had almost literally been held hostage.

A simple but compelling explanation for Kivuitu’s change of mind is that he was not only pressured, but threatened to release the results.¹²¹ To some people who knew him, Kivuitu’s behaviour appeared to confirm that he “was certainly intimidated”.¹²² Other interviewees either corroborated this threat, or were unsurprised by this information in the context of Kenyan politics. Indeed, at least one senior Kenyan government official was “personally involved in the consultation

¹¹² WikiLeaks (2008: 08NAIROBI13_a).

¹¹³ Patel (2008).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Interview with diplomat, 12 November 2014.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Interview with Michael Yard, 29 August 2014

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Interview with Jorgen Elklit, 12 September 2014.

¹²¹ Unattributable interview, 15 August 2014.

¹²² Interview with diplomat, 31 November 2014.

about death threats to people who were vocal in opposition” to the rigging of the elections.¹²³ In the context of Kenyan politics, it is possible, if not likely, that Kivuitu was personally threatened to release the results dictated by the government. Another interviewee corroborated the rumour that Kivuitu “had been threatened, not only himself, but his family, and that he didn’t want to make any public statement until his family was safely hidden away.”¹²⁴ This explanation clarifies why Kivuitu reversed course overnight, against his long-standing concerns about the risk of electoral violence. I will explore this question in CHAPTER 8, where I discuss whether such cases of coercion undermine an agent’s ability to do otherwise.

Kivuitu’s second argument is that “there was no other candidate or his/her agent seeking me to hold on and re tally – no.”¹²⁵ As we have seen, this is also untrue, since there is evidence that Raila Odinga was pushing for such a re-tally, with the backing of key Western powers. Thirdly, Kivuitu claimed that “Commissioners do not tally counted results.” Their job is to announce results.¹²⁶ But we know that Kivuitu himself had the intention not only of refusing to announce the results, but of resigning publicly. Finally, Kivuitu argued that “the genesis of the tragedy is in our dirty politics and negative ethnicity,” rather than in his own personal role. In his most convincing defence, Kivuitu wrote:

I do not share the view that people killed others, or destroyed the properties belonging to others, on account of my announcement of the winner. I believe that irrespective of whoever of the two top candidates won, there was going to be violence. That environment was created by the politicians themselves.¹²⁷

This is a sound argument. Evidently, the fate of Kenya did not rest on Kivuitu’s shoulders alone, and the responsibility for the killings should not misattributed to Kivuitu. There is evidence, according to diplomatic sources, that PNU supporters were also armed and may likewise have reacted violently in the event of an Odinga victory.¹²⁸ Thus, the post-electoral violence could simply have played out in reverse.¹²⁹ The bulk of policy-makers interviewed for this case study agree with Samuel Kivuitu on this final point.

One interviewee endorsed Kivuitu’s view that there “was really not that much he could have done...I can’t imagine anything that anyone could have done at that point to prevent” the post-electoral violence.¹³⁰ A second interviewee agreed that Kivuitu’s agency was too constrained by the state having “effectively infiltrated the ECK” and by his deteriorating health to affect the crisis.¹³¹ A third interviewee noted that it was possible that “the socio-political climate was by that stage so

¹²³ Unattributable interview.

¹²⁴ Unattributable interview.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Brown (2009: 404).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Interview with Michael Yard, 29 August 2014

¹³¹ Interview with Neha Saghrjka, 28 October 2014.

toxic that any spark would have ignited the conflagration, but no one will ever know.”¹³² Interestingly, not a single interviewee had heard of Kivuitu’s intention of resigning. One person argued that this “would not have changed much” in the crisis, and speculated that Kivuitu “may have feared that such a move would plunge the country into a constitutional crisis.”¹³³ Another interviewee doubts that it would have changed much, and speculated that it “would almost certainly have caused greater violence than happened anyway.”¹³⁴ A third remarked that this “sounds consistent with the guy who I knew,” but doubted it would have changed much.¹³⁵ “When push came to shove,” another commented, “Kivuitu did not act on any of the intentions that he expressed verbally, and those intentions had absolutely no substance in my view.”¹³⁶

This discussion reveals an interesting contention regarding Kivuitu’s role in the crisis. Some interviewees are saying that there was really not much else he *could* have done, given the structural constraints. Others are arguing that, had he resigned, as he said he intended to do, the crisis would not have played out differently. The first argument, I suggest, is mistaken, in that it dismisses alternative courses of action which Kivuitu himself actually considered. The second argument, however, is up for debate. This question is not about whether Kivuitu *could* have done otherwise. Evidently he could have, not only because he had free will, but because he self-consciously charted an alternative course of action. The debate is about the causal *influence* of his proposed resignation. While I agree that this is, in principle, impossible to ever know counter-factually, it is a question worth pondering.

I am not arguing that Kivuitu alone had the power and responsibility to prevent violence. Kibaki, Odinga and a thousand tribal leaders had much more influence to do so.¹³⁷ However, I am arguing that, as Chairman of the ECK and the central pillar in an international strategy to prevent violence, Kivuitu’s words carried tremendous weight on 30 December. In a sense, “Kivuitu dug his own grave” with his comment on returning officers cooking the books, and thereby undermined any influence he may have had in the crisis.¹³⁸ While Kivuitu’s actions did not cause the violence in a deep sense – on that, Kivuitu is correct – they may have done so in an immediate sense. A brief scenario can substantiate this point.

¹³² Interview with Judge Johann Kriegler, 15 September 2014.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Interview with diplomat, 31 October 2014.

¹³⁵ Interview with Michael Yard, 29 August 2014.

¹³⁶ Interview with Margie Cook, 29 October 2014.

¹³⁷ As Margie Cook has argued: “Every politician, from the president down, should take personal responsibility for some of what happened... [and] had a responsibility to encourage people to behave decently and peacefully, and not use the election as a means of wreaking revenge on 45 years of injustices.”

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

In one existing counter-factual, Stephen Brown argues that the “main critical juncture where donors could have decisively taken another path was on 30 December 2007.”¹³⁹ In this scenario, Brown suggests that, following Kivuitu’s announcement of a Kibaki victory, “donors could have insisted on an immediate recount.”¹⁴⁰ Had Western powers been united, it is likely that a delegitimised Kibaki government would not have been able to cling to power.¹⁴¹ This does not mean that violence would not have broken out, but its scale and intensity might have been significantly shorter or less deadly.

I would propose another scenario, also beginning on that crucial date, 30 December. Instead of doing as he was pressured to do, Kivuitu could have defied the government ban on live media broadcasts (as the U.S. embassy had), and addressed the following words to bipartisan and multi-ethnic crowds in Uhuru Park or on live radio:

As head of the ECK, it is my professional and moral duty to resign. Today, you showed great patience and orderly conduct in waiting for hours and voting in historic numbers. However, I am saddened to say that the ECK, which I represented, lost control of returning officers. I stress that there is evidence of gross tampering *on all sides*. Both pro-government and pro-opposition forces appear to have cheated. I therefore urge the people of Kenya to remain calm, and I appeal to the international community to assist Kenya in organising a swift re-tally and, failing that, to return to internationally-organised elections in two months.

Of course, these words alone may not have sufficed to prevent the pre-planned violence. The Kibaki government may have simply cracked down on dissent, arrested Kivuitu and outlawed the ODM. Alternatively, Kibaki, if pressured by the international community,¹⁴² may have consented to a re-tally after an initial stand-off. There is really no telling how such a statement may have altered the course of events; it must remain speculative. There are negative or neutral prognostications, as above. But some have added that Kivuitu’s actions may also have served as a catalyst for international and domestic pressure on the parties to compromise.¹⁴³ Either way, I argue that the implications of Kivuitu’s potential resignation – which are unknowable – would not have been causally neutral. His actions on 30 December essentially undermined his influence, and practically triggered the electoral violence. There is therefore sound reason to believe that if Kivuitu had acted as suggested above, he may have altered the course of the crisis, in one way or another.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explored in great depth the role that Samuel Kivuitu, head of the Electoral Commission of Kenya, played during the 2007-2008 post-electoral crisis. As I demonstrated, Kivuitu held a very important role in an internationally-backed strategy to prevent renewed

¹³⁹ Brown (2009: 400).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² One diplomat admitted that Western ambassadors failed to pressure Kibaki over his contravention of the “gentleman’s agreement” with the opposition over ECK appointments. Interview, 31 October 2014.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

electoral violence in Kenya. As the head of the ECK, he was held in extremely high esteem, both by the Kenyan public and the international community. His role was not only to ensure that the elections were free and fair but to seek to prevent electoral violence, which he was clearly concerned about months before the election. As we saw, he had announced to the U.S. ambassador that in the event of rigging he would resign in order to undermine the government's legitimacy. When the moment came, however, Kivuitu backed down.

This case study has shed new light on a little-known sub-plot to the post-electoral crisis. Importantly, it demonstrated that one bureaucrat's actions may have changed Kenyan history. I conceded that it is impossible to prove beyond reasonable doubt whether Kivuitu's actions alone could have prevented any electoral violence. However, there is good reason to believe that, had he acted as he said he would, the crisis would likely have taken a different course. This chapter revealed the agential power which Kivuitu exercised at the pivotal turning point of 30 December, a day which appeared to open up multiple causal paths. His decision to endorse Kibaki's election at such a crucial moment – perhaps influenced by a death threat – was arguably one of the direct causes of the 2007 violence. Had Kivuitu acted differently, for example by stepping down, the crisis would most likely have taken a radically different turn. That is not to say that such a move would certainly have prevented violence; but it would almost certainly have changed the likelihood of violence. None of this is to argue that Kivuitu *should* have acted differently, only that he *could* have. I defer further discussion of the moral quandary of acting under duress until CHAPTER 8.

Finally, this case study critiqued the argument that profound structural causes, such as atavistic tribal hatreds, caused the violence. To be sure, ethnic demonisation played an immensely influential part in inciting people to kill fellow Kenyans of different tribes. However, the point is that *individuals* – especially unscrupulous leaders – purposively manipulated ethnic hatreds and fears the better to channel violent passions towards political ends. I will also return to this argument below, when I address the question of how methodological individualism can explain cases of apparently spontaneous mass violence. I conclude this chapter by noting that the above analysis would be lost, or useless, at a higher level of abstraction. If tribes, or ethnicities, or even nation-states were taken as the primary unit of analysis, individuals like Kivuitu would not appear to play a decisive role in the events described in this chapter. Yet he demonstrably did.

The final chapter turns to an international crisis which followed on the heels of that in Kenya. The August 2008 Russo-Georgian war was the first inter-state war in Europe in decades and, in many respects, a precursor of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. It is an extremely poignant case since it reveals the likely limits of efforts to prevent war. As I will seek to demonstrate, there was no lack of such efforts in 2008. In fact, there were various diplomatic actors and institutions working around the clock to prevent a war. Many such actors saw it coming, and did everything they could to

prevent it. But it came nevertheless, not because of structural forces or conflict trends beyond human control; rather, it came because powerful individuals manoeuvred intentionally in order to bring it about.

Matthew Bryza - The Russo-Georgian War, 2008

“The problem is that...as a [mediator] you couldn’t rely on anybody. You couldn’t trust Saakashvili, because he was uncontrollable. The Abkhaz had their hidden agenda. The Russians have their hidden agendas, and the Americans. Then, you can do anything you want with preventive diplomacy – it will fail.”
- Senior European diplomat¹

The August 2008 war is arguably one of the most instructive cases of preventive diplomacy, for several reasons. Firstly, it reveals the limitations of many efforts to prevent war. An army of mediators converged on the conflict zone in the summer of 2008, carrying various plans to avoid war. Their dramatic failure makes this such a rich and relevant case. In the INTRODUCTION to this dissertation, I stressed that cases of failed diplomacy are often richer in data than successes. In this case, however, many of the diplomatic actors involved remain tight-lipped about their experiences. As one interviewee noted, failed mediators are unlikely to be talkative on the Georgian crisis “simply because this was all a failure.”² In short, careers still hang in the balance of history’s verdict.³ Whereas successes like Kenya have many parents, failures are orphans.⁴ Finally, this case comes close to confirming that when one or more parties to a dispute have formed the intention to go to war to achieve their aims, preventive diplomacy is virtually bound to fail.

By drawing on original interviews and U.S. diplomatic cables, I explore the various attempts to prevent war in Georgia prior to 7 August 2008. I focus primarily on U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza’s peace initiative in May 2008. I also study peace initiatives that preceded and succeeded it, in order to better contextualise Bryza’s efforts. I focus on this particular mission because, as I will argue, it was the most promising of all. After detailing Bryza’s mission, I analyse why it failed. I will argue that even the most skilled mediator would likely have failed to prevent war, since powerful individuals on both sides simply did not want to prevent it. Finally, to nuance this pessimistic argument, I explore the missed opportunities in attempts to prevent this war.

BACKGROUND

Like most nations, in its early history Georgia was little more than an “imaginative concept”.⁵ Annexed by Russia in 1801, Georgia was only briefly independent between 1917 and 1921.

¹ Unattributable interview.

² Interview with former OSCE official, 12 August 2014.

³ The handful of interviewees I spoke to were open to sharing their insights and experiences. However, some key figures in this drama have been unreachable for over three years.

⁴ Numerous interviewees I spoke to pinned the blame on specific personalities or organisations. Others claimed to be sworn to secrecy on why this mission failed. In this particular case study, my attempts to glean information sometimes resembled a Hollywood spy game.

⁵ Goltz (2006: 25).

Nationalists revolted against Soviet rule in 1956 and 1978,⁶ and again in 1989.⁷ This narrative might suggest a straightforward case of national liberation from imperial oppression. But, within the microcosm of Georgian politics, this narrative plays out in reverse. Andrei Sakharov called Georgia “the little empire”.⁸ The 1989 Soviet crackdown was aimed at halting Georgian rallies targeting the ethnic Abkhaz minority, which had just declared independence. What Russia had done to Georgia, Georgia did to the Abkhaz, making Georgian the sole official language.⁹ Georgian nationalists shamelessly incited hatred by vilifying “devil Russia” and “non-Georgians”. Zviad Gamsakhurdia advocated that they “should be chopped up...burned out with a red-hot iron from the Georgian nation.”¹⁰ Georgia was soon ripped apart by inter-ethnic violence.

Russia played an “ugly and obscure” role in Georgia’s internal wars.¹¹ Russian soldiers fought alongside separatists in South Ossetia, and in Abkhazia.¹² Both sides of the conflict in South Ossetia perpetrated atrocities and ethnic cleansing.¹³ The fighting was even crueller in the former beachside-resort region of Abkhazia.¹⁴ Even when a Russian MIG-29 was shot down, and the pilot’s body recovered in full uniform, Moscow denied any involvement.¹⁵ Still, Russian leaders claimed “special powers as a guarantor of peace and security” in the region.¹⁶ Russia was obviously a party to these wars, rather than a disinterested peace-keeper.¹⁷ Russian fighters, their weapons and ammunition were all chartered to Abkhazia on board official Russian humanitarian relief planes.¹⁸ Like Kenya, modern Georgia was a failing and ethnically-polarised state. Unlike Kenya, it had Russia as a neighbour.

The game changed with the rise of Saakashvili, who promised revolutionary change.¹⁹ Saakashvili looked up to King David IV, who had repelled the Turks and united Georgia.²⁰ This gave a hint of his political agenda. Internally, the president sought to fight corruption.²¹ Externally, Saakashvili sought to escape Russia’s sphere of influence.²² In practice, this meant joining the EU and NATO. Russian leaders reacted with alarm at the prospects of NATO troops based on its

⁶ *Ibid.* 44.

⁷ The catalyst was the slaughter of 19 unarmed protestors by Soviet paratroopers. *Ibid.* 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Abkhazians and South Ossetians, especially, spoke their languages first, and Russian second. Very few (about 10%) actually mastered the Georgian language. English (2008: 21).

¹⁰ Kaufman (2001: 110), cited in English (2008: 22-23).

¹¹ Goltz (2006: 98).

¹² *Ibid.* 133-136.

¹³ UNHCR (1997), Human Rights Watch (1992: 3-5).

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch (1995).

¹⁵ Goltz (2006: 140-141).

¹⁶ Cited in Human Rights Watch (1992: 38).

¹⁷ Lynch (2001: 12).

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch (1992: 51).

¹⁹ Tudoroiu (2007: 320-321).

²⁰ Civil Georgia (2004).

²¹ Cornell (2007: 7).

²² Ditrych (2008: 121).

border.²³ They saw U.S. support for democratic revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine as a direct threat.²⁴ Saakashvili confirmed these fears by campaigning to close a Russian base on Georgian soil.²⁵ When Saakashvili succeeded, Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly told him: “Now remember, we did not intervene...but you won’t have any gifts from using South Ossetia and Abkhazia.”²⁶ Putin further told Saakashvili, in 2006, that trying to join NATO was harmful to Russian interests.²⁷ A diplomatic crisis erupted in October 2006 when Georgian police arrested alleged Russian spies. In response, the Russian government sanctioned Georgian workers in Russia,²⁸ imports of Georgian goods and gas exports.²⁹ Ominously, unidentified helicopters attacked Georgian officials in the Kodori Gorge in March 2007. In August 2007, a Russian-made anti-radar missile hit Georgian territory.³⁰

In February 2008, the West recognised the independence of Kosovo. This move reinforced Moscow’s fears of an “aggressive agenda” in Washington to undermine Russian interests.³¹ Putin called Kosovo a “terrible precedent” that would “come back to hit them in the face.”³² In private, he warned European leaders that if the West recognised Kosovo’s independence, he would respond by officially recognising Georgia’s separatist regions.³³ During Saakashvili’s last official encounter with Putin, the Russian leader warned:

As for the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in this regard we shall respond not to you, but to the West—America and NATO, and in connection to Kosovo... What we do will not be directed at you but will be our response to them.³⁴

Kosovo was highly symbolic for Russia.³⁵ Russian leaders experienced the West’s recognition of Kosovo as an intense humiliation.³⁶ As a result, by February 2008, Putin was openly envisaging armed intervention in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This intention became clearer in April, in the aftermath of the NATO summit in Bucharest. One diplomat recalled hearing loud footsteps thudding outside the main door; it slammed open. In walked Putin, in a theatrical display of Russian power.³⁷ By early 2008, Russian opposition to the Georgian and Ukrainian attempts to gain a

²³ Tudoroiu (2007: 320).

²⁴ Cohen (2007: 23, 33).

²⁵ Antidze (2007).

²⁶ Asmus (2010: 75).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 71.

²⁸ Russia “made repeated public statements singling out Georgians as illegal immigrants, portraying them as criminals, and calling for measures to be taken against them.” Human Rights Watch (2007: 2).

²⁹ Asmus (2010: 17).

³⁰ Lucas (2008: 190).

³¹ Lombardi (2009: 70-71).

³² Sydney Morning Herald (2008).

³³ Interview with senior European diplomat, 11 August 2010.

³⁴ Illarionov (2009: 67).

³⁵ Filatova (2008).

³⁶ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist (2009: 324).

³⁷ Interview with European diplomat.

NATO membership offer was “shrill and threatening”.³⁸ If Ukraine joined NATO, Putin threatened, Russia would consider Kiev a legitimate target in a nuclear war.³⁹ At the summit, Putin assured Western leaders, magnanimously, that Moscow would “wriggle and behave very carefully...without provoking military conflicts.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, analysts anticipated that Russia was ready to intervene to stop Ukraine or Georgia from joining NATO. Ukraine seemed the most likely target.⁴¹

After late-night and divisive negotiations, NATO heads of state announced the compromise that “these countries will become members of NATO.”⁴² The Russian reaction was crystal clear. At the summit, Putin had delivered a monologue claiming that Ukraine was not even a nation-state.⁴³ Now, he made an ambiguous parting statement about NATO’s enlargement being a direct threat to Russia.⁴⁴ Twenty minutes later, he released a communiqué announcing, much more clearly, that Russia “will provide effective assistance to South Ossetia and Abkhazia in return for NATO’s decision.” Putin’s colleagues filled in the details. Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that Russia would “do everything possible to prevent the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO.”⁴⁵ The Chief of the General Staff announced that Moscow was preparing “military steps” as well as “steps of another nature” to make sure that Georgia and Ukraine did not join NATO.⁴⁶

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

To make sense of the key diplomatic initiatives in 2008, we must briefly review the twenty-year efforts to make peace in the region. This section will separate the peace initiatives in Abkhazia from those in South Ossetia, as each conflict is distinct. The above section dealt with the dispute from the heights of great power politics; we now descend into the two regions. Although at the previous level Russia appears plainly culpable of geopolitical cynicism, at the lower level the picture is very different. While Georgia framed the conflict as one with a neo-imperialist Russia, the Abkhaz and Ossetians saw it as one with a revanchist Georgia. Georgian military incursions into both regions, in 2004-2006, destabilised the *status quo*. Peacemakers in both regions faced a lack of good faith on all sides. Efforts to prevent renewed violence in the region followed a clear division of labour. The UN took the lead in Abkhazia, and the OSCE in South Ossetia. I will discuss each in turn.

³⁸ Gallis et al. (2008: 7).

³⁹ Miller (2006: 13), AFP (2008).

⁴⁰ Putin (2008).

⁴¹ Gallis et al. (2008: 25).

⁴² NATO (2008).

⁴³ Interview with senior European diplomat, 7 July 2010.

⁴⁴ Mu (2008).

⁴⁵ Cited in Smith (2008: 127).

⁴⁶ Baluyevsky shocked his NATO counterparts in early May by urging them to cancel a military exercise scheduled for that summer, lest Western soldiers be killed in the crossfire of a war in Georgia. See Asmus (2010: 149), Reuters (2008).

The UN Security Council asserted its role in Abkhaz-Georgian peace talks in 1993.⁴⁷ In 1995, Abkhaz negotiators almost agreed to a confederal arrangement.⁴⁸ After the collapse of this proposal, another almost succeeded in 1997.⁴⁹ It collapsed again in 1999.⁵⁰ Georgia accepted this last proposal, but the Abkhaz refused it, as it pre-judged Abkhazia's status.⁵¹ Peace talks were only revived when Secretary-General Kofi Annan wrote to the Abkhaz.⁵² A third renaissance of peace proposals arose in 2004-2006.⁵³ By this time, however, Russia was beginning to link the future status of Kosovo with that of Abkhazia. The EU's foreign policy chief and Saakashvili worried about the consequences of this argument. But the Georgians took rash actions in 2006 which killed off hopes of a peace deal. Georgia's military budget quadrupled between 2003 and 2007, stoking Abkhaz security fears.⁵⁴ In June 2006, a report warned that Saakashvili's "high risk strategy" of rushing to resolve Georgia's territorial issues was pushing it towards war with Russia.⁵⁵ The next month, Tbilisi sent armed forces into the Kodori Gorge, installing an Abkhaz government-in-exile.⁵⁶ This was a clear sovereignty claim, much like the U.S. collecting taxes in the disputed Aroostook valley. Victoriously, Saakashvili announced that "we will come back to our homes very soon, we will come back from every direction."⁵⁷ By undermining the political legitimacy and territorial control of their negotiating partners, the Georgians froze all peace talks.

An even grimmer picture emerges of peace talks in South Ossetia. The 1992 ceasefire in South Ossetia established a Joint Control Commission (JCC), facilitated by the OSCE.⁵⁸ In July 2004, Tbilisi ordered an operation to close a black market in South Ossetia. This sparked killings which nearly degenerated into renewed war.⁵⁹ Saakashvili unveiled a new peace plan in 2004, which resembled the formula of his Abkhaz proposals.⁶⁰ As Georgian-Russian relations deteriorated in 2006, Saakashvili began agitating for a revision to the JCC.⁶¹ In a dangerous gamble, Georgia vetoed its participation in the JCC in 2006, making a change of format a precondition for dialogue.⁶² Finally, Tbilisi supported a parallel administration in South Ossetia led by Dmitry

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group [ICG] (2007a: 3).

⁴⁸ It is noteworthy that the Russian government, at this stage, was pushing the Abkhaz to accept this solution *Ibid.* 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Boden (2011).

⁵¹ ICG (2007a: 9).

⁵² Unattributable interview.

⁵³ The sides also reportedly came close to signing a mutual renunciation of the use of force in 2005 – a major Abkhaz demand – but again failed. ICG (2007a: 13).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ German (2006: 5).

⁵⁶ As one Georgian official bluntly said during the crisis: "This is a strategic territory, from where a helicopter flight to Sokhumi [the capital of Abkhazia] takes only five minutes." Cited in ICG (2007a: 17).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ ICG (2007b: 1, 9).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 9.

⁶² *Ibid.* 10, 11.

Sanakoyev. The majority of South Ossetians saw Sanakoyev as “a Quisling” paid by the Georgians.⁶³ Like in Abkhazia, Saakashvili increased South Ossetian fears by building up Georgia’s military, increasing its police presence and undermining the local regime’s legitimacy.⁶⁴ Georgia’s actions encouraged South Ossetia to assume a war footing. By 2007, the situation had deteriorated, with OSCE patrols being held up at gunpoint to prevent them from monitoring Ossetian strongholds.⁶⁵ The JCC, the only conflict management mechanism in South Ossetia, was suspended when it was most needed.

In the end, all sides in the escalating crisis showed bad faith. Russia was, for all intents and purposes, a party to the dispute. Both separatist states, feasibly as a result of guarantees from Russia,⁶⁶ therefore had no incentive to compromise. In any case, the basic negotiating positions were antithetical: autonomy vs. full independence.⁶⁷ Tbilisi’s major strategic mistake may have been to claim that it had no conflicts with either Abkhazians or South Ossetians. The Abkhaz saw this position as a blatant “myth” which distorted history,⁶⁸ as did the Ossetians.⁶⁹ Framing the conflict as such tended to delegitimise the fears and aspirations of the separatists, and to dangerously antagonise Russia. Georgia’s actions, the International Crisis Group (ICG) concluded, although non-violent, were “so assertive that they are contributing to a perceptible and dangerous rise in tensions.”⁷⁰ Saakashvili launched another major proposal in March 2008.⁷¹ On the face of it, it was a generous proposal, creating an Austro-Hungarian style dual government. In substance, however, it simply recycled old initiatives which had never gained traction. The separatist leaderships saw such olive branches from Tbilisi as aimed primarily at proving Georgia’s peaceful intentions to the international community.⁷² Internally, Georgian statements were much more bellicose and threatening.⁷³ By 2006, peace talks in both regions were moribund.

BRYZA’S PEACE INITIATIVE

One of the most important mediation efforts of the 2008 Georgian crisis was drafted, implemented and advocated by Matthew Bryza, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. Long before the crisis, Bryza was working to facilitate direct Abkhaz-Georgian talks, to check Russian moves and to

⁶³ *Ibid.* 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 18.

⁶⁶ Unattributable interview.

⁶⁷ ICG (2007a: 32).

⁶⁸ Kvachelia (2010: 56).

⁶⁹ ICG (2007b: 9).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Civil Georgia (2008).

⁷² ICG (2007b: 1).

⁷³ *Ibid.* 8.

urge the Georgians to refrain from provocative actions.⁷⁴ Bryza regularly discussed Georgian affairs with his Russian counterpart, Grigory Karasin, with whom he appeared to enjoy a warm relationship.⁷⁵ By late 2007, however, Karasin's lines were toughening. He warned of an alleged Georgian plan to attack the two separatist regions around December, against which Russia was prepared to act.⁷⁶ In Tbilisi, the general feeling was that time was not on Georgia's side. President Saakashvili, in particular, was impassioned by the perceived threat of Russia annexing Abkhazia.⁷⁷ The president's own family harboured the guilt of not fighting off Russian annexation in 1921.⁷⁸ In the year of the crisis, Bryza also worked extremely closely with major European diplomatic actors to coordinate an international response. One of his most important interlocutors was Jean Arnault, the UN Secretary General's special envoy in Georgia.

When they met in January, Arnault and Bryza worried that the UN's efforts were failing.⁷⁹ Both sides were losing interest in the peace process.⁸⁰ This was ominous, at a time when the Georgians perceived Russia tightening its grip on Abkhazia. The only upside, the diplomats agreed, was that Abkhaz *de facto* president Bagapsh "realizes that joining a confederation with Georgia is likely to be their best option."⁸¹ Arnault suspected that Russian pressure aimed to make Georgia renounce its NATO aspirations.⁸² Kremlin hardliners also appeared to be gaining the upper hand on recognising Abkhazia.⁸³ At this critical time, the UN Friends of Georgia group was "focusing solely on minutiae," Bryza lamented, "rather than on the urgent need for a political resolution of the Abkhazia conflict."⁸⁴ This was the first seed in Bryza's campaign to shift negotiations to "the bigger question" of a political resolution.⁸⁵

Over the next months, the situation became positively alarming. By March 2008, Karasin warned his American counterparts that "the explosive Kosovo precedent" and the question of NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine were pushing Russia into a corner.⁸⁶ The U.S. should now

⁷⁴ In a July 2007 meeting, for example, Bryza urged the Georgians to avoid provoking the Abkhaz side in the Kodori Gorge, which the former saw as a bridgehead for a future Georgian attack. He was working to induce the Abkhaz *de facto* foreign minister, Sergei Shamba, to meet Georgian president Saakashvili in Bonn. The Abkhaz remained open to this meeting. WikiLeaks (2007: 07TBILISI1604_a).

⁷⁵ WikiLeaks (2007: 07MOSCOW5147_a).

⁷⁶ Karasin was lukewarm in supporting Bryza's proposal that Saakashvili meet Abkhaz president Bagapsh. *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ WikiLeaks (2007: 07TBILISI2813_a).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI114_a).

⁸⁰ As the U.S. cable notes: "The Georgians believe that taking a bottom-up approach hinders progress on the larger goal of resolving the conflict, while the Abkhaz argue that this approach prevents their long term goal of independence."

Ibid.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI116_a).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Bryza's optimism was encouraged by his view that 1) there were tensions between Russia and Abkhazia which Georgia (and the West) could exploit, and 2) President Bagapsh was a pragmatist. *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW748_a).

decide what kind of Russia it wants, and make its “strategic choice”.⁸⁷ The Abkhaz had their own strategic choice to make. In April, *de facto* Foreign Minister Shamba rejected Saakashvili’s latest peace proposal.⁸⁸ In conversation with the U.S. ambassador, he blamed the West for giving Abkhazia “no choice” but to ally with Russia. “You’re giving us no alternative,” he insisted. Shamba was wary of Russian influence, noting that if they attempted an outright annexation, the Abkhaz would take up arms against them. Although Shamba reiterated the Abkhaz precondition for talks with Tbilisi – that the Georgians withdraw from the Kodori Gorge – he was still open to dialogue.⁸⁹ On his side, Saakashvili remained calm in the face of Russia’s growing military footprint in Abkhazia.⁹⁰ But conflict was brewing. Even the anti-war moderates in Saakashvili’s administration were becoming increasingly nervous at the prospects of a coming war with Russia over Abkhazia.⁹¹

The Americans sensed a diplomatic opening. On 8 May, Matthew Bryza unveiled a plan to his British, French and German colleagues to revive the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process. The plan he had personally designed,⁹² which he would take to Georgia, had three key elements:

1. Encourage Georgia to elaborate its proposal of autonomy for Abkhazia;
2. Put pressure on Russia to prevent further infringement of Georgia's sovereignty;
3. Create a new forum to oversee the implementation of measures to create economic, social, and information links between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, and to foster direct Georgian-Abkhaz talks.⁹³

The thinking behind this plan, according to Bryza, was that “we recognized back in Washington...that the Russian side, and President Putin, had manoeuvred President Saakashvili into an impossible decision between either acquiescing to the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia...or go[ing] to war with Russia.”⁹⁴ In this way, the U.S. peace initiative was designed “to give Saakashvili a way out” by proposing a third option.⁹⁵ Upon his arrival in Tbilisi, Bryza presented the plan to his UN colleague, Jean Arnault, who agreed with Bryza that the current Friends of Georgia group was a broken mechanism.⁹⁶ Arnault observed that the Abkhaz “see themselves as stuck between a pig (Russia) that wants to gobble up all of Abkhazia and a dog (Georgia), that

⁸⁷ The choice presented the U.S. was that between “a Russia that is stable and ready to calmly discuss issues with the U.S., Europe and China, or one that is deeply concerned and filled with nervousness.” *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI712_a).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ On April 16, Putin issued his famous “instructions” lifting sanctions on Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and moving towards the establishment of formal diplomatic relations – that is, recognition. WikiLeaks (2007: 08TBILISI718_a) and MOFA(2008).

⁹¹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI724_a).

⁹² Although he drafted the above terms, Bryza credits the overall idea to an ongoing conversation in the National Security Council involving State Department and White House officials. Interview with Matthew Bryza, 31 July 2014.

⁹³ This is a direct quote from a U.S. cable. WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI844_a).

⁹⁴ Interview with Matthew Bryza, 31 July 2014.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI844_a).

wants to attack Abkhazia and take it back by force.” To undo that perception, Georgia needed to signal its goodwill.⁹⁷

In Tbilisi, Bryza attempted to dampen warnings of war emanating from the Georgian leadership, and called Russia’s actions provocative.⁹⁸ The Russian foreign ministry immediately cast doubt on his role as a mediator.⁹⁹ Moscow’s actions in Abkhazia, according to Russian experts, “were designed [to] demonstrate clearly for a German and French audience all the problems NATO would inherit if it were to shelter Georgia.”¹⁰⁰ Russia was imposing a clear choice on Georgia: territorial integrity or NATO membership. This was clearly about NATO, U.S. diplomats opined.¹⁰¹ Moscow might have believed that it held all of the cards in the escalating crisis, but “providing the Abkhaz with a better deal than fealty to Moscow could fundamentally change the Caucasus dynamic over time,” the Moscow embassy advised.¹⁰²

Bryza first moved to secure broad political support in Georgia for his plan. He promoted it to senior Georgian officials, including the Foreign Minister, who was initially sceptical. When his plan encountered resistance, Bryza tied Georgia’s prospects of NATO membership to its peaceful conduct in Abkhazia. He flatly warned that any attempt to reclaim its separatist provinces by force would result in Georgia losing both the provinces *and* U.S. support.¹⁰³ Bryza reiterated this warning to senior Georgian officials who had been contemplating armed action.¹⁰⁴ He promoted his plan in Tbilisi to moderates and rabid populists alike.¹⁰⁵ The most important of Bryza’s meetings took place during his visit to Abkhazia on 10 May. His interlocutor, *de facto* President Bagapsh, appeared open to meeting Georgian officials, but insisted on four pre-conditions. There must first be:

1. An agreement on reducing the number of Georgian troops in the UKV [Kodori valley];
2. A non-use of force pledge;
3. The lifting of economic sanctions; and
4. The establishment of a sea link between Trabzon and Sukhumi.¹⁰⁶

Bryza responded positively, noting that “Bagapsh offered a reasonable basis for further negotiations, and about the best one could hope for at that point.”¹⁰⁷ Bryza proposed that both the Georgians and Abkhaz forces could withdraw entirely from the Kodori valley, leaving the local

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Cited in Fuller (2008).

⁹⁹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW1335_a).

¹⁰⁰ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW1285_a).

¹⁰¹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW1298_a).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI904_a).

¹⁰⁴ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI923_a).

¹⁰⁵ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI831_a).

¹⁰⁶ This is a direct quote of Shamba’s proposal, noted by Bryza and Ambassador Tefft. WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI835_a).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Matthew Bryza, 7 September 2014.

Svan population to ensure their own security, with UN oversight.¹⁰⁸ When Bagapsh raised the presence of Georgian troops in the Kodori valley, Bryza “responded that the U.S. has told the Georgians bluntly that if they start a war in Abkhazia, they would lose, they would be alone, and their NATO aspirations would be finished.”¹⁰⁹ Crucially, Bagapsh did *not* object to these peace proposals, as he had earlier in the year. He even stressed that he did not support Russia’s recently increased presence in Abkhazia, and agreed to meet Georgia’s foreign minister, as soon as they reached agreement on the Kodori Gorge. The U.S. ambassador emerged from the meeting impressed by the fact that the Abkhaz, “even the usually aggressive and inflexible...were clearly trying to appear as constructive as possible in their talks with Bryza.” The Abkhaz did not appear to want a war. After the meeting, Shamba stated that he felt safe because the Americans were mediating the crisis.¹¹⁰

Back in Tbilisi, Bryza relayed his intuition that the Abkhaz were open to compromise.¹¹¹ He “knew we had a shot at an agreement,” and now worked to persuade the Georgians of its merits.¹¹² The Abkhaz leader had dropped the pre-condition that Georgia withdraw from the Kodori Gorge. Instead, they appeared open to negotiating that very point. Relaying the Abkhaz proposal to Interior Minister Merabishvili, Bryza stressed that Georgia’s policies alienated Abkhazia and pushed it into Russia’s arms.¹¹³ In parting, Bryza warned him that “war is a bad option for Georgia, and will destroy any chance for the country to enter NATO as well as cost it valuable support in Washington and European capitals.”¹¹⁴ He pressed the Georgian minister to remain patient while the U.S. peace initiative bore fruit. Bryza continued to promote his peace plan broadly in Tbilisi for the rest of the month.¹¹⁵ Georgia maintained the official pre-condition that recently-arrived Russian troops withdraw from Abkhazia before negotiating a non-use of force pledge.¹¹⁶ Russian officials rejected this linkage, and expressed a lack of confidence in Bryza’s strategy of discussing the bigger political questions.¹¹⁷ Moscow clearly disliked the U.S. peace plan.

Fascinatingly, Bryza’s initiative came to an abrupt end not in Tbilisi, but in Berlin. The last time they had met in May, the Western Friends of Georgia – which excludes Russia – had given Bryza’s initiative their qualified support. Germany and France were more sceptical of Georgia’s peaceful

¹⁰⁸ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI835_a).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI808_a).

¹¹² Interview with Matthew Bryza, 7 September 2014.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ This is not a direct quote from Bryza, but is text directly quoted from a U.S. cable. *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Bryza’s ownership of the peace initiative is clear in that, even his own colleagues referred to “Bryza’s peace plan”.

WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI910_a).

¹¹⁶ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI924_a).

¹¹⁷ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW1681_a).

intentions than Washington.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Berlin wanted to take ownership of the peace initiative, which Bryza accepted.¹¹⁹ The implication became clear on June 12, at the Friends' meeting in Berlin. The Germans tabled a new peace proposal. It advocated beginning with confidence-building measures (CBMs), effectively putting off the question of Abkhazia's status. Bryza warned that the parties risked becoming "bogged down" in CBMs while the situation deteriorated,¹²⁰ and advised that the paper allow the parties to negotiate an agreement, rather than dictating it to them.¹²¹ Finally, he reaffirmed his view that Abkhazia's final political status was *the* most urgent priority.¹²² Bryza stressed to his European colleagues the importance of deploying EU police monitors in the Kodori Gorge:

Look, there probably aren't three people anywhere, *on earth* – at the risk of an exaggeration – who could do more right now to avoid war in Georgia...because you can press the EU to authorise police monitors or trainers in the Kodori Gorge. And we are absolutely convinced, in Washington, that is *the key step* to keep the parties separated, and to avoid a war.¹²³

Bryza's peace plan revolved around solving the impasse in the Kodori Gorge. The key to peace, in his mind, was to station neutral monitors to oversee local policing. Theoretically, this gesture would allow negotiations to resume. However, when Bryza floated the possibility of an EU police presence in the Kodori Gorge, the European ambassadors unanimously rejected it as politically impossible.¹²⁴ Matthew Bryza recalls feeling "crestfallen after that. I was very frustrated."¹²⁵ This is how the Bryza initiative ended. It became the German plan dubbed the 'Steinmeier Plan.' The next day, the Western Friends were meant to meet in the broader format involving Russia. However, Moscow withdrew its participation for unclear reasons; German Chancellor Merkel was particularly offended.¹²⁶

THE STEINMEIER PLAN

German Foreign Minister Steinmeier's peace plan became the central Western peace initiative prior to the August 2008 war. As we saw, it had grown out of Bryza's own plan, but had reversed the priorities, postponing discussion of Abkhazia's status. For the Europeans, placing EU monitors in the disputed Kodori Gorge was a bridge too far. Behind the scenes, question marks surrounded Germany's role in the crisis. Matthew Bryza and Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt agreed that

¹¹⁸ WikiLeaks (2008: 08PARIS976_a).

¹¹⁹ Interview with Matthew Bryza, 31 July 2014.

¹²⁰ WikiLeaks (2008: 08PARIS976_a).

¹²¹ UN special envoy Jean Arnault was similarly critical. Even the German Foreign Office's colleagues at the Chancellery considered the paper to be "a bit heavy". However, the German ambassador noted, the Foreign Office was "very stubborn about changing it." This strict directive suggests the personal involvement of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the formulation of this plan. See *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Interview with Matthew Bryza, 31 July 2014.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ WikiLeaks (2008: 08PARIS976_a).

Berlin was “complicating the peace process... by requiring that every step...be cleared in advance with Moscow.”¹²⁷ Germany was so wary of angering Russia that it carefully submitted each initiative for Moscow’s approval.¹²⁸ In fairness, it should be acknowledged that Berlin inherited the mantle of peace-making at a most difficult time in the crisis. A track two meeting between Abkhaz and Georgian officials in Sweden, organised by an academic, had not borne fruit.¹²⁹ The Georgians were so disillusioned with international peace talks that even anti-war Georgian ministers contemplated the use of force.¹³⁰

However, the diplomatic opening Bryza had perceived still existed. President Bagapsh reiterated a proposal he had suggested to Bryza: stationing a joint EU police force in the Kodori Valley, to create a buffer between both parties.¹³¹ Moreover, Bagapsh implored the Europeans to act “quickly”, alluding to Russia’s increasing presence in Abkhazia.¹³² Around the same time, the Georgian leadership was also open to this compromise, while also imploring the European powers to act quickly.¹³³ As such, Germany was not responsible for the environment of increasing tensions which it inherited in June 2008. However, as Germany assumed the lead in Western efforts to prevent war in Georgia, the diplomatic opening Bryza had perceived (even if not his plan) was still on the table.

On 30 June, the Friends met again in Berlin; this time, Russia attended. At the meeting, the Germans presented their three-phase strategy for resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz dispute.¹³⁴ The German chair asked for a quick turnaround to present the plan to the disputants before the summer break. But the Russian representative stated that Moscow would not support such a plan until *September*, after a meeting between Medvedev and Saakashvili. The German ambassador warned that the Group of Friends was “down to its last bullet” to resolve the conflict.¹³⁵ If Russia did not help, the German warned, it would be excluded from future peace initiatives.¹³⁶ The same day, Georgia’s foreign minister reiterated the urgency of the crisis to the Western Friends, calling for a new negotiating format.¹³⁷ The Steinmeier initiative’s success would depend on its ability to allay Georgian fears in the face of Russian provocations, while allaying Abkhaz fears about Georgian intentions.

¹²⁷ WikiLeaks (2008: 08STOCKHOLM452_a).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ While the meetings (especially the smoke breaks) were frank, the Abkhaz delegates were hard-line and uncompromising. WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI1121_a).

¹³⁰ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI1121_a).

¹³¹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI1182_a).

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ WikiLeaks (2008: 08WARSAW812_a).

¹³⁴ WikiLeaks (2008: 08BERLIN906_a’).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI1160_a).

Steinmeier led the final push for peace in his three day visit to the region on 17-18 July. By all accounts, this mission had failed before it began. Russian and Abkhaz officials rebuffed the Steinmeier Plan before the minister arrived in Georgia.¹³⁸ On 17 July, the Abkhaz leader announced that he would not even “consider the plan”.¹³⁹ Russian foreign minister Lavrov also cast doubt on Steinmeier’s trip before it began.¹⁴⁰ Steinmeier’s meeting with the Abkhaz was particularly difficult. The Abkhaz disliked “Steinmeier’s condescending attitude”.¹⁴¹ Conversely, the Germans also complained of “a rude Bagapsh reception”.¹⁴² What followed was a triple rejection of the Steinmeier plan: by Abkhazia, then Georgia and finally Russia. Firstly, the Abkhaz leader reiterated his wholesale rejection of Steinmeier’s plan.¹⁴³ Bagapsh was uncompromising. “We are not going to discuss Abkhazia’s status,” he said. “Abkhazia is an independent state.”¹⁴⁴ Secondly, Georgia also reiterated its own preconditions.¹⁴⁵ Finally, Russia ended Steinmeier’s initiative by formally endorsing Abkhazia’s preconditions.¹⁴⁶

The failure of Steinmeier’s peace initiative was total, as German diplomats recognised.¹⁴⁷ Steinmeier told Lavrov that he had not expected to meet such resistance on all sides. Lavrov *gently* rejected Steinmeier’s initiative, German diplomats believed, out of fondness for Steinmeier personally, rather than for his plan.¹⁴⁸ Diplomatic subtleties aside, Steinmeier had been humiliated.¹⁴⁹ In late July, the German foreign minister noted grimly that diplomatic efforts were “not fully back to square one, but close to it.”¹⁵⁰ Steinmeier intended to invite the Georgians and Abkhaz to Berlin for negotiations, but this meeting never occurred.¹⁵¹

Meanwhile, American efforts to reach out to the Abkhaz continued. Even after the failure of the Steinmeier mission, the U.S. was still advocating that EU observers could stabilise the Kodori Gorge.¹⁵² Although Georgia was not blameless, U.S. officials argued, Russia was the principal aggressor; some European officials agreed.¹⁵³ Turkish officials also saw Russia as trying to provoke

¹³⁸ Socor (2008).

¹³⁹ RFE/RL (2008).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Hewitt recounts that Steinmeier “addressed Abkhazia’s president...as ‘Bagapsh’. It was only when the President imitated his guest by addressing the Foreign Minister as ‘Steinmeier’ that the visitor remembered his manners.” Cited in Hewitt (2013: 230).

¹⁴² WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW2094_a).

¹⁴³ Cited Niedermaier (2008: 384).

¹⁴⁴ Cited in New York Times (2008).

¹⁴⁵ Niedermaier (2008: 384).

¹⁴⁶ Twickel (2008).

¹⁴⁷ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW2094_a).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Unattributable interview.

¹⁵⁰ WikiLeaks (2008: 08BRUSSELS1120_a).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² WikiLeaks (2008: 08BRUSSELS1138_a).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Georgia into making a fatal mistake on the ground.¹⁵⁴ Throughout July, Bryza continued to campaign quietly on his Kodori Gorge proposal.¹⁵⁵ On 25 July, Bryza and the German ambassador travelled to Abkhazia to attempt to revive his proposal.¹⁵⁶ He emerged frustrated at the numerous preconditions and lack of concessions on both sides.¹⁵⁷ One week later, a wave of sniper fire, shells and improvised explosions swept through South Ossetia and Abkhazia. President Bagapsh refused to attend peace talks in Berlin.¹⁵⁸ Bryza flew to Moscow and met General Buzhinsky, whom he pressed to help deescalate tensions in the Kodori Gorge.¹⁵⁹ Russia's military build-up in Abkhazia, Bryza complained, was strengthening the hands of the Georgian hawks "foolishly" advocating war.¹⁶⁰ The Russian general warned of a direct NATO-Russia military confrontation if Georgia joined the alliance.¹⁶¹ Around this time, an OSCE official in Ossetia recalls feeling that time was running out; her usual interlocutors were manning trenches.¹⁶² War broke out six days later. OSCE officials in Tskhinvali were soon holed up in their basement, with shells exploding in their courtyard.¹⁶³ The peacemakers had failed.

ANALYSIS

Despite this failure of diplomacy, we are entitled to ask whether the August 2008 war was bound to occur as and when it did. I will argue that, the positions of all antagonists being what they were, a war of some description was extremely likely. But this does not make it inevitable by any stretch of the imagination. As I will seek to demonstrate, international actors attempting to prevent war made a series of strategic errors. I will begin by briefly analysing the peace efforts of the UN, the OSCE and the EU in May-August 2008, airing critiques of their attempts to prevent war. Secondly, I will ask the counter-factual question of whether Bryza's peace plan, if it had remained *the* plan, may have made a tangible difference to the flow of events. I argue that it would most likely have done so, even if it may not have prevented what was ultimately a war of choice.

The UN was the main actor in charge of conflict prevention in Abkhazia. However, it was crippled from the outset by Russia's participation in the process. A former UN official was cognisant of the fact that Russia was actually a party to the dispute, rather than a neutral

¹⁵⁴ WikiLeaks (2008: 08ANKARA1269_a).

¹⁵⁵ Behind the scenes, Bryza was requesting the support of Slovakia and Poland in stationing police officers in the Kodori Gorge. WikiLeaks (2008: 08BRATISLAVA310_a) and (2008: 08WARSAW812_a).

¹⁵⁶ Bedwell (2008).

¹⁵⁷ Mchedlishvili (2008).

¹⁵⁸ WikiLeaks (2008: 08TBILISI1327_a).

¹⁵⁹ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW2297_a).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Interview with former OSCE official, 1 August 2014.

¹⁶³ Interview with Ryan Grist, 18 August 2014.

mediator.¹⁶⁴ Whenever the UN was close to a breakthrough in negotiations, “the Russians tried to intervene” to prevent an agreement.¹⁶⁵ Russia simply worked from within to hamper any peace initiatives against its interests. At the April summit in Bucharest, Putin basically “made the declaration to Western powers that the admission of Georgia [to NATO] was a *casus belli*.”¹⁶⁶ Moreover, Russian military preparations were obviously in motion in early spring 2008.¹⁶⁷ Thus, the August 2008 war “was like a Greek tragedy: in the end the tragedy had to happen, there is no choice.”¹⁶⁸ However, this fatalistic account forgets that individuals working at the UN arguably did have an impact on the crisis.

As early as 2007, UN officials in Abkhazia had drawn up a contingency plan to prevent violence. But the proposal languished in New York.¹⁶⁹ One official spoke darkly about careerist, high-level officials having done “nothing – exactly nothing to prevent this.”¹⁷⁰ When the crisis escalated in July 2008, a senior UN official was finally named UN Special Representative. He was too risk averse, a critic charged, and “did not even manage to publish a report.”¹⁷¹ The disgruntled critic argued that senior officials on the ground, that year, were “a typical product of UN bureaucracy.”¹⁷² When tensions escalated, a key UN official was on sick leave and out of area.¹⁷³ Some suggest that Heidi Tagliavini, a former OSCE and UN diplomat in the region, could have made a difference. After the war, the chief of the Security Council of Abkhazia supposedly told Tagliavini: “If you were here, we probably would not have had the war.”¹⁷⁴ The interviewee’s explanation is that “the wrong people in the wrong place” failed to prevent the war.¹⁷⁵ This certainly tends to confirm the overall argument of this dissertation.

Another key conflict prevention institution was the OSCE, which had overall responsibility for South Ossetia. On the ground, Moscow had immense leverage to undermine the OSCE’s efforts by militarising the South Ossetian population, restricting OSCE monitors, and undermining the JCC of substance.¹⁷⁶ As a result, the Georgians made a strategic decision to opt out of this negotiating format.¹⁷⁷ Initially, the OSCE was firmly opposed to changing the negotiating format in South

¹⁶⁴ Interview with former UN official, 11 February 2012.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ “Some people did not want to take actions, responsibilities.... Better to be a bureaucrat...doing what their masters tell them,” he concludes. *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Unattributable interview, 12 August 2014.

¹⁷⁷ One interviewee noted that, even if it was justified in seeking internationalization of this body, Georgia’s policy was largely counter-productive: “The Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia was trying to convince the Georgians to get out

Ossetia. On May 30, however, Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, announced a sharp policy U-turn. After speaking with the Georgian foreign minister, he repeated the Georgian position that the JCC was dead.¹⁷⁸ Thomas de Waal credits this statement with having “effectively killed off the Joint Control Commission without an alternate format being in place.”¹⁷⁹ Preferring not to be identified, several officials pinpointed this OSCE announcement as a fatal mistake.¹⁸⁰ This move was “a major mistake, especially in the context of daily incidents on the ground and serious tension.”¹⁸¹ The Finnish Chairmanship of the OSCE had all but “developed for various reasons into being ostensibly pro-Georgian.”¹⁸² This position constrained the OSCE’s influence in the crisis, since Tbilisi had no incentive to attend JCC meetings.¹⁸³ The implications of this policy became evident on the day the war broke out. An emergency meeting of local co-chairs could simply not be held, since the Georgians refused to attend.¹⁸⁴

The OSCE chairman’s statement reinforced the perception that the OSCE – whose mission head was decorated by the Georgian president¹⁸⁵ – was too close to Georgia to be neutral.¹⁸⁶ This fed the allegation that political officers in the mission re-worded military observers’ reports to make them sound more innocuous.¹⁸⁷ After the war, the OSCE submitted highly “filtered texts” to the Tagliavini fact-finding mission.¹⁸⁸ Another theory is that the OSCE was generally caught unawares by the war. The Deputy Head of the OSCE mission in Georgia, Ryan Grist, recalls that violence was not abnormal prior to the war.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, when President Saakashvili announced a unilateral cease-fire on the eve of the war, Grist went home, assured that the crisis had been contained – until he began receiving 2am phone calls.¹⁹⁰ Internal OSCE recriminations after the war focussed on whether the lower-level field mission or higher-level political leadership had failed.¹⁹¹ In Grist’s view, it is unfair to blame the field mission for the geopolitical machinations of high politics.¹⁹²

from this logic, but the Georgians would not listen. His mandate was expiring in mid-July 2007 (after a bit more than three years), but rules allowed for an extension. However, the Georgians blocked it and he was replaced (by a diplomat who agreed with the Georgians that the JCC should be regarded as dead).” *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ OSCE (2008).

¹⁷⁹ De Waal (2010: 210).

¹⁸⁰ Unattributable interviews.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Unattributable interview, 12 August 2014.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Rustavi2 (2009).

¹⁸⁶ Unattributable interview.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Heidi Tagliavini, 16 January 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Ryan Grist, 18 August 2014.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ BBC (2008b).

¹⁹² Interview with Ryan Grist, 18 August 2014.

This is a sound argument. Grist may have been a convenient scapegoat to avoid questioning the actions of higher-level OSCE officials.¹⁹³

A third important actor in pre-August 2008 conflict prevention efforts was the EU. As an institution, the European Union “could not really get its foot into this door” in conflict prevention efforts prior to the war.¹⁹⁴ The EU’s special representative was mandated to juggle the conflict in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh, forcing him to split his focus.¹⁹⁵ One interviewee suggested that the EU special representative, Peter Semneby, lost patience too quickly.¹⁹⁶ Another high-level official characterised the EU’s pre-August 2008 role as “timid”.¹⁹⁷ The dominant position in the EU was that, even if Russia was intentionally raising tensions, the Georgians should avoid antagonising Russia.¹⁹⁸ There was also tension between the EU and its member-states. Some national diplomats in the Group of Friends resisted letting any EU “tentacle” into the process.¹⁹⁹ Theoretically, the EU could have played a crucial role in preventing conflict escalation, since it was the only organisation in which Russia did not have a veto.²⁰⁰ This explains why Bryza insisted on deploying EU monitors to the Kodori Gorge. The EU had discussed deploying such monitors in 2005,²⁰¹ and in 2007,²⁰² but desisted from fear of offending Russia.

During his June visit to Georgia, Javier Solana, according to one EU diplomat, “smelled an opportunity” to play a constructive role in June 2008.²⁰³ During that trip, which appeared positive in tone,²⁰⁴ Solana attempted to carve out a facilitating role for the EU in Abkhaz-Georgian negotiations.²⁰⁵ However, President Bagapsh – in stark contrast to his meeting with Bryza – now rejected any EU role in the Kodori Gorge. Georgia was prepared to sign a ceasefire with Abkhazia, if the EU guaranteed the agreement.²⁰⁶ In the end, the window of opportunity which Solana perceived shut abruptly. One official spoke of Solana being “almost ousted” from Georgia.²⁰⁷ In the end, another official suggested, the idea that the EU held the key to peace “was all very naïve, simply because Russia could easily obstruct the implementation on the ground of whatever the EU would decide by simply telling the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians to block it.”²⁰⁸

¹⁹³ Champion (2008).

¹⁹⁴ Unattributable interview.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Unattributable interview.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ WikiLeaks (2008: 07TBILISI1604_a).

²⁰⁰ Unattributable interview.

²⁰¹ Popescu (2009).

²⁰² Rettman and Goldirova (2008).

²⁰³ Interview with EU official, 1 February 2012.

²⁰⁴ EU Council (2008).

²⁰⁵ Di Puccio (2008).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Unattributable interview.

²⁰⁸ Unattributable interview.

Having examined the mistakes which the UN, OSCE and EU allegedly made prior to the war, we are better placed to reconsider the relative importance of Matthew Bryza's peace plan. A sceptic may reasonably argue that *nothing* the above actors did differently would have prevented war. This critique helps to frame the counter-factual question of whether Matthew Bryza's plan would have been any different, had the Western powers pursued it. Arguably, it *would* have made a major difference, but probably not a big enough one to prevent war. The most likely difference Bryza's peace plan would have made, had Germany not taken over peace efforts in May 2008, was to neutralise Russia's ability to veto this initiative at will.

A major mystery of the Steinmeier plan is why Russia reversed course overnight. At first, Russian diplomats expressed public support for the Steinmeier plan.²⁰⁹ During Steinmeier's visit, however, Russia ensured the diplomatic death of the Steinmeier plan. Bryza, who at this stage was still promoting his plan, critiqued Russia's sudden *volte face*.²¹⁰ On 21 July, he accused Russia of acting in bad faith.²¹¹ This anecdote reveals the fatal flaw in the Steinmeier plan: it gave Moscow a say on each step in this peace initiative. When the plan did not go as Russia wanted, Moscow pulled the rug from under it. This point is crucial to understanding how Bryza's plan may have affected the crisis. Both the Abkhaz and Georgians saw the U.S. as a credible mediator – uncontestably pro-Georgia, but uncontestably interested in peace. In fact, Bryza's meeting with Abkhaz president Bagapsh revealed that the Abkhaz felt reassured by the involvement of the United States. The U.S. was practicing a strategy of double reassurance, giving guarantees to the Georgians and Abkhaz aimed at containing conflict.

Hypothetically, had Bryza remained the leader of the Western peace initiative in early 2008, American leadership may have made a major difference. Evidently, Russia preferred a German initiative which it could more easily veto. This is the crucial difference: Bryza's peace plan *intentionally* cut Russia out of the process. Had Russian leaders announced during Bryza's visit – as they *did* – that the U.S. was not an impartial player, this would not so easily have pressured Bagapsh to reject the initiative. As Bryza had discovered, the Abkhaz leader was seriously worried about a possible Russian annexation. It was less Bryza's actual plan, than the fact that he represented the U.S., which gave him such sway. The identity of mediators often counts for more than the specific measures they propose.²¹² The U.S., in May 2008, had a fierce independence from Russian foreign policy which Germany plainly lacked, and which may have bought time for peace proposals to gain traction.

²⁰⁹ Niedermaier (2008: 396).

²¹⁰ Nichol (2008: 19).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² See Frida Möller (2010).

In the end, Bryza's plan may not have prevented the war. The U.S., like other diplomatic actors, "picked the wrong conflict zone."²¹³ It is noteworthy that violence exploded in South Ossetia just as peace efforts in Abkhazia were beginning to bear fruit. A meeting in Berlin was scheduled, and Georgia intended to sign a non-use of force pledge. Some have speculated that this timing was not coincidental at all.²¹⁴ One UN official intimated a rumour that the "more independent-minded" Abkhaz leaders "were not willing to cooperate on attacking Georgia; the South Ossetians were."²¹⁵ If this is true, Bryza's peace plan may not ultimately have prevented *some* kind of war. However, the Bryza peace initiative might have pulled Abkhazia out of Russia's orbit. This would have fundamentally changed the nature of the war.

One interviewee, involved in negotiations with the Abkhaz, revealed that one of the reasons that peace talks seldom advanced was due to frequent death threats against *Abkhaz leaders*.²¹⁶ Every time a leader made strong peace gestures, their political fortunes would suddenly end, or they would receive death threats from thugs *pour encourager les autres*. If true, this allegation would certainly explain why the Abkhaz felt so comforted by the U.S. mediators being in town.

Bryza's peace plan was not without flaws. For one, it took Saakashvili's March 2008 plan as its basis, which senior Abkhaz leaders had already rejected. The Georgian plan was the departure point of the U.S. initiative. This is surprising, since American diplomats in Moscow had already concluded that Saakashvili's March 2008 peace plan was "dead on arrival."²¹⁷ Moreover, Saakashvili's peace plan took Abkhazia's status (autonomy) as a fixed end-point of negotiations, rather than a negotiable point. However, all international actors except Moscow took Georgia's territorial integrity as the starting principle of peace talks.

In the final analysis, the Bryza plan would probably not have succeeded in preventing war. The reason, as the opening quotation suggests, is simple: Russia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia only wanted peace on *their* terms. The Russian government, first and foremost, appears to have systematically acted to undermine peace initiatives which did not favour its interests. For example, Saakashvili made a desperate proposal on 21 June, effectively putting Georgia's territorial integrity on the negotiating table.²¹⁸ Conspicuously, the proposal did not revoke Georgia's NATO aspirations, which Putin had made clear was the only deal on offer. When the Russian government politely refused, a Georgian official commented: "We are going to have a hot summer."²¹⁹ As one

²¹³ De Waal (2010: 209).

²¹⁴ Heidi Tagliavini was of the view that the war "should have broken out in Abkhazia, and then it was shifted to South Ossetia. It remains a mystery why. I can have some guesses, but it remains a mystery why..." Interview with Heidi Tagliavini, 16 January 2012.

²¹⁵ Interview with former UN official, 11 February 2012.

²¹⁶ Interview with Daniel Kunin, 23 October 2014.

²¹⁷ WikiLeaks (2008: 08MOSCOW1298_a).

²¹⁸ See Asmus (2010: 161).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

interviewee noted, the main issue was simply that Russia “did not want to negotiate.”²²⁰ The Georgians were correct that time was not on their side.²²¹ However, Tbilisi’s unilateral stationing of troops in the Kodori Valley was a constant impediment to peace initiatives in 2008.²²² It was, as Bryza foresaw, a potential key to peace.

While not faultless, the Abkhaz leadership, Heidi Tagliavini argues, “were totally afraid of a new war. They would have done *everything* to avoid that war.”²²³ The Abkhaz had agreed, in 1994, to negotiating Abkhazia’s integration *with* Georgia into a new Union state.²²⁴ Neither the Georgians nor the international community revived such an imaginative possibility. There was simply no institutional memory of various peace initiatives.²²⁵ International peace efforts in 2008 also suffered from this “lack of inventiveness”.²²⁶ As Heidi Tagliavini concluded, the May-July peace initiatives represented “old stuff rewarmed.”²²⁷ The failure of all diplomatic efforts in 2008 stemmed from a lack of good faith, which the most flawless peace plan could have done nothing to alter. In this very limited sense, and in this sense only, the August 2008 war was bound to happen.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the various efforts to prevent the August 2008 war. It explored in most depth the role of Matthew Bryza’s peace initiative in May. I argued that this initiative might have made a major difference to the crisis, had the Western powers supported it. Instead, Steinmeier’s plan failed before it began, partly because Russia discarded it. This case is the most vexing failure of preventive diplomacy covered in this dissertation. It reveals the near-impossibility of preventing war by diplomatic means when at least one party has decided to go to war. For years, Russia was remarkably clear on the choice it imposed: Georgia could reclaim its territories and forget NATO, or join NATO and forget its territories. War broke out because Saakashvili attempted to break out of this binary choice.

Secondly, this case reveals that conflict prevention institutions are only as effective as the actors who make them up *want* them to be.²²⁸ Finally, the failure of preventive diplomacy in Georgia is particularly revealing of the personality politics of preventive diplomacy. Beyond this chapter, the

²²⁰ Interview with former UN official, 11 February 2012.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² See Kommersant (2008).

²²³ Interview with Heidi Tagliavini, 16 January 2012.

²²⁴ Shamba (2002).

²²⁵ One interviewee noted that when Yakobashvili began work as the head of the Ministry for reintegration, “only one person had institutional memory of what happened out of 50 or 100 people. Sometimes they came to me when they wanted their own documents. They did not know what happened two years ago.” Interview with former UN official, 11 February 2012.

²²⁶ Interview with Heidi Tagliavini, 16 January 2012.

Ibid.

²²⁸ As Asmus (2010: 146) argued, the August 2008 war was “just one more example of how a European security system that had been set up to provide transparency and early warning, to prevent strategic miscalculation, and to prevent crisis and war would fail in the spring and summer months of 2008.”

Georgia case also illustrates some of this dissertation's philosophical arguments, and nuances others.

Firstly, this case revealed the importance of an agent's identity in peace efforts. Like General Scott in 1839, and Dag Hammarskjöld in 1956, Matthew Bryza, while skilled and influential in his own right, was immeasurably more effective for being a representative of the United States. His peace plan gained the sympathies of the Abkhaz, at least in part, because of the power he represented: the U.S. As I explained, both Abkhaz and Georgians distrusted Russian intentions. This is precisely the common ground which Bryza exploited. Since Steinmeier deferred to Russia, the parties distrusted his plan too. The United States was a powerful mediator in May 2008, and was uniquely placed to guarantee Abkhaz and Georgian security against threats from each other. Of course, this is partly a reflection of the United States' preponderant power in world affairs.

This case chapter suggests an important concession to structural theories: Bryza determined his own actions in 2008, but he did not alone causally determine the *influence* of his actions. I will explore this important nuance in the next chapter.

This case study also ties into the last in an expected way: a death threat against Kivuitu, and one against the Abkhaz in 2008, may have undermined all hopes for peace. If allegations of such threats are well founded, we have discovered a cruel problem: the barrel of a gun may undermine an agent's ability to do otherwise, and make war inevitable. Death threats, potential assassinations and successful ones have featured prominently in most of the previous case studies. In 1861, a potential assassin allegedly aimed to take Lincoln's life. Franz Ferdinand's assassination sparked a great power crisis in July 1914. Count Tisza almost suffered an assassin's bullet during the war, and finally did so in 1918. An assassination attempt on Zhou's life almost succeeded, potentially bringing the U.S. and China into another war. Finally, as we saw in the last two chapters, Kivuitu and the Abkhaz appeared to have been deterred from acting in a way that might have prevented war due, allegedly, to death threats. This all suggests that we ought to dive deeper into the question of coercion, and its relation to free agency, in the next chapter.

For now, I conclude that the above evidence serves as a chilling reminder of the pivotal role of individuals in history. If individuals did not change the course of events, why have assassins long threatened or taken their lives to do so? Had assassins miscalculated the causal efficacy of their actions, their craft may have disappeared long ago. Unfortunately, however, they are not wrong. The above case studies have substantiated the point that individuals have an enormous, seemingly disproportionate, effect on war and peace. Attempts to coerce or kill influential people reveal, if nothing else, the causal role of individuals in history. As I argued earlier, Lincoln's death in early 1861 would have transformed the secession crisis. Similarly, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, had he

lived,²²⁹ would probably have cooperated with his enemy, Count Tisza, to restrain the Austrian war party. The argument that, in one individual's place, another would simply take his place is oversimplistic, as I will argue in the next chapter. While killing an individual may not rearrange larger structural power relations, it may catalyse a destructive war which does so. This conclusion is theoretically rich, so I now turn to discussing it, and other insights into human agency collected from the preceding case studies.

²²⁹ See Lebow (2014b).

PART III

Practical Theory

“Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.”
- Immanuel Kant

Agency in Preventive Diplomacy

“I wear the chain I forged in life.
I made it link by link, and yard by yard;
I girded it on of my own free will, and
of my own free will I wore it.”¹
- Charles Dickens

The previous chapters recounted six efforts to prevent war across diverse historical periods. They traced an American general’s machinations in Maine, William Henry Seward’s efforts to preserve the Union and Count Tisza’s heated meetings in Vienna. They followed Dag Hammarskjöld’s trip to China, Samuel Kivuitu’s fateful change of mind in 2007, and Matthew Bryza’s plan in 2008. The only constant across these cases was the sharp focus on specific individuals. I have therefore already addressed the first part of this dissertation’s research question, on how individuals have attempted to prevent war historically. I will now address the second part, by reflecting on which causal roles the diverse agents played in determining the outbreak, or prevention, of war. As such, this chapter is more than a summary of key findings. It distils the original contributions to knowledge in this dissertation, weaving diverse philosophical and historical threads into a coherent whole. Before proceeding, I will explain what this will involve.

This dissertation focussed on the role of human agency in diplomatic attempts to prevent war. Towards that end, it produced a patchwork of historical and philosophical material. This material now serves to build the foundations of a practical theory of preventive diplomacy. A practical theory is a coherent chain of concepts designed to assist the judgments of practitioners. I begin by expanding on this ambition below, using Clausewitz’s seminal work as both an organising device and a theoretical influence.

Thereafter, I structure discussion around the key concepts explored in CHAPTER 1: contingency, free will and individualism.² I discuss how examples from the cases may support, nuance or undermine these theoretical premises. Finally, I consider three critiques, making concessions to structuralist theories of war. I conclude that the concept of agency may help scholars to appreciate the intensely agent-centric world of practitioners, and for both to begin to speak a common language. To achieve this end, we first turn to the most famous Western philosopher of war, Carl von Clausewitz, who combined deep theoretical acumen and practical experience in battle. It may seem counterintuitive to utilise the writings of Clausewitz when presenting a theory of preventive diplomacy, since he wrote about war, not peace, but I explain this choice below.

¹ Dickens (1854: 17).

² Since *agent-causation* is only an explanation of how *free will* is possible, and is therefore impossible to distinguish empirically, I fold it into the latter concept in this chapter.

Despite intense interest in this endeavour, a theory of preventive diplomacy remains elusive. As Wallenstein and Möller conclude, “nothing close to a prevention theory can be distilled.”³ This, I argue, is at least partly because the literature developed in isolation from broader debates on agency and on the causes of war. Why Clausewitz, an authority on war with a deep interest in agency, has been missing from these debates is puzzling. Clausewitz’s writings continue to be used in Western military academies around the world to teach officers how to plan, fight and win wars. He may therefore seem an awkward guest in this discussion. But this concern is unwarranted. Clausewitz’s theory of war is arguably the best guide to build a practical theory of preventive diplomacy. There are three reasons why *On War* is a compelling guide: its subject matter, its intellectual history and its focus on agency.

Although Clausewitz did not concern himself with its causes, he saw war as political. Politics, Clausewitz observed, is “the womb in which war develops – where its outlines already exist in their hidden, rudimentary form, like the characteristics of living creatures in their embryos.”⁴ Clausewitz defined war as “an act of violence to compel the enemy to fulfil our will,” which was not over until the enemy’s will was subdued.⁵ The objective of war is not merely to destroy an army, but to compel leaders to abandon the will to fight. This is what Clausewitz meant by the enemy’s “final decision”.⁶ Preventive diplomacy therefore pursues the same objective as war – neutralising leaders’ will to fight – by other means.

Clausewitz is also relevant because he critiqued deterministic theories of war. *On War* emerged in reaction to three schools of thought. The first school consisted of those Clausewitz mocked as “the most erudite and scholarly officers”. Clausewitz also critiqued anti-theoretical writers on war who claimed that it was a fool’s errand to generalise lessons from the individual genius of a Napoleon.⁷ Clausewitz was most critical of a third group of writers, who did think that a generalisable theory of war was possible, but who attempted to find its immutable laws.⁸ According to such theorists, it was possible to discover precise mathematical formulae which would determine the exact logistical and technical conditions necessary to win war. “They aim at fixed values; but in war everything is uncertain,” Clausewitz wrote.⁹ Here we are reminded of one of the mechanical

³ Wallenstein and Möller (2004: 11).

⁴ Howard (2002: 34).

⁵ Clausewitz (1982: 123).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Howard (2002: 23).

⁸ *Ibid.* 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*

metaphor of war, discussed in the INTRODUCTION. While Clausewitz “thinks like a scientist”,¹⁰ his view of the world is indeterministic.

Thirdly, Clausewitz’s work aimed to supersede these dated theories with one that was representative of the inherent elements of chance, contingency and agency in every war. His famous concept of *friction*, which “distinguishes real War from War on paper,”¹¹ was short-hand for the unpredictable role of human agency and chance. Clausewitz argued that “all military action is intertwined with psychological forces and effects.”¹² Although he saw war as both a psychological and physical contest, he clearly saw the former – the will to fight – as the most important.¹³ Under the friction of war, he wrote, “the inertia of the whole [unit] gradually comes to rest on the commander’s will alone.”¹⁴ Clausewitz was critical of his superior during the Napoleonic wars, General Phull, whose mathematical approach to war ignored the crucial human element.¹⁵ *On War* is an agent-centric theory of war.

I have set out three reasons why Clausewitz may guide our theory-building efforts. I will use this philosophical text, first and foremost, to connect the various philosophical links below. Drawing on Clausewitz’s concepts of the Will, moral forces, contingency and causation, I attempt to connect my conclusions into a chain of argumentation. This chapter, if successful, will lay the philosophical foundations of a practical theory of preventive diplomacy. If I fall short of this ambition, what follows will be a laundry list of isolated philosophical conclusions drawing on history. I will leave that judgment up to each reader.

CONTINGENCY

The six previous case studies have all demonstrated, to varying degrees, that the success or failure of efforts to prevent war is contingent upon seemingly minor events. Future events, as Aristotle argued, are innately contingent, undetermined and unknowable. In some sense, future events “seem to float in a wider sea of possibilities”.¹⁶ Poetically, we may see the future as a “garden of forking paths,” in which “time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures.”¹⁷ From this point of view, the future is inherently unpredictable because uncaused. This played out in several distinct ways across the case studies. We can generally distinguish between at least two classes of contingency: strong

¹⁰ Footnote 88, *Ibid.* 428

¹¹ The basic principle is as follows: “Everything is very simple in War, but the simplest thing is difficult.” Clausewitz (1982: 164).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 27.

¹⁴ As Howard (2003: 28) wrote: “Even the best generals were successful gamblers who had the nerve to back their judgment. No amount of theory could, in a moment of crisis, tell them what to do.”

¹⁵ See footnote 73, Clausewitz (1982: 426).

¹⁶ James (2007:151).

¹⁷ Cited in Ferguson (2011a: 70).

and weak. What I call strong contingencies are those weaved into the very fabric of history: chance events.

In 1838, General Scott knew his Canadian interlocutor *by chance*, having saved his life on the battlefield of 1812. It was not chancy that Scott saved an enemy officer's life; this was his conscious choice. What was entirely chancy is that he should save *that specific* soldier's life, the soldier who would become, decades later, his negotiating partner. This strangest of bonds was crucial in finding a peaceful solution. In 1860, William Henry Seward lost the presidential nomination, in part, because of a printing error. When the ballot papers failed to print properly, an extra couple of days were needed to fix them. This gave Seward's enemies sufficient time to negotiate a coalition in support of Lincoln. In July 1914, Russia's anti-Austrian ambassador inadvertently worsened the crisis by dying of a heart attack on the floor of the Austrian embassy. This catalysed ultranationalist protests in Serbia, which further weakened Count Tisza's resistance to the war party's pressure. Had the ambassador's heart failed a day earlier, the war party may have failed to pressure Tisza.

In all of the above cases, chance played a crucial role. However, it would be misleading to see the role of chance as anything more than a causal influence. If the final step to war is always a *conscious* decision by human beings,¹⁸ chance cannot causally determine the outcome of crises. Presumably, no laws of nature dictate that enemy soldiers, printing errors, or heart attacks, under specific conditions, cause or prevent wars. At most, these contingencies were forking paths in the garden of time, but it took human agents to walk those paths. This raises an important question: Can policy-makers plan for chance events? By definition, I see strong contingencies as beyond conscious human control, not because we do not know anything about heart attacks and printing errors, but because their role in the complex chain of causation leading to war is unpredictable. There is, however, a weaker form of contingency which humans may arguably foresee and prepare to meet.

Weak contingencies are those causal paths which open up as a result of purposive human actions, whether intentionally or not. By purposive actions, I exclude heart attacks and other involuntary movements. Several examples from the above cases demonstrate this distinction. In early 1861, an assassin allegedly plotted to kill Lincoln while he travelled to the capital; Seward and General Scott intervened to save his life. Had they not, Lincoln may have been killed in 1861, and the course of the secession crisis taken a radically different path. In this sense, Seward and Scott responded to an unexpected contingency – a potential assassin – and reacted in time to foil it. A very different example is from the July crisis. Franz Ferdinand's assassination demonstrates that even purposive actions (driving a vehicle down one street) may have unintended consequences

¹⁸ See Suganami's argument in CHAPTER 1.

(giving a waiting assassin a prime vantage point). His driver never intended to contribute to the Archduke's assassination, but he inadvertently did.

Using the example of the sleeping Kaiser, we can see that contingency is a fork in time which opens up a number of *potential* paths. On one key evening of the July crisis, for example, the German Kaiser went to bed blissfully ignorant of a crucial telegram from Vienna. Had the Kaiser woken up during the night, he would have read his mail in time to practically veto a planned Austrian attack on Serbia. The Kaiser's opposition may have strengthened Tisza's resistance to the Viennese war party. Which path becomes *actualised* depends upon either purposive actions of agents (not waking him up), the unintentional action of an agent (the Kaiser having a nightmare), or the intervention of a chance event (a bird shrieking at his window). It seems unbearably absurd to think that a nightmare may have changed the course of history. Its absurdity does not make it untrue. This discussion appears to corroborate Butterfield's point that history sometimes pivots on minor events.¹⁹

The complex interaction of chance events beyond human control, and soft contingencies, is the natural environment of crises. This environment resembles war in certain key respects:

[It] is the province of chance... [which] increases the uncertainty of every circumstance, and deranges the course of events. [A commander] constantly finds things different from his expectations; and this cannot fail to have an influence on his plans, or at least on the presumptions connected with these plans.²⁰

Above, I argued that humans could not control chance events – such as shrieking birds – which are unpredictable. However, weak contingencies may fall within the scope of human foresight. Fortune, as Machiavelli called it, “is the mistress of one half of our actions, and yet leaves the control of the other half, or a little less, to ourselves.”²¹ By prudence and foresight, Machiavelli thought, agents might be able to tame Fortune.²² In the next chapter, I set out exactly how practitioners might prepare for such contingencies in efforts to prevent war, drawing on the military art of contingency-planning.

For now, I conclude by reiterating a key insight for practical theory: the outcome of preventive diplomacy is indeterministic. This is an abstract point of great importance, as Clausewitz explains in his critique of deterministic theorists of war:

They strive after determinate quantities, whilst in War all is undetermined... They direct their attention upon material forces, while the whole military action is penetrated throughout by intelligent forces and their effects. They only pay regard to activity on one side, while War is a constant state of reciprocal action, the effects of which are mutual.²³

¹⁹ Butterfield (1955: 5).

²⁰ Clausewitz (1982: 140-141).

²¹ Cited in Kocis (1998: 47).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Clausewitz (1982: 184).

Wars are contingent precisely because of the human element.²⁴ Although medicine is a complicated science, dealing with a complex organism, war is much more so.²⁵ War deals with even more “mysterious agencies”.²⁶ The “living reaction” of protagonists to each other’s actions is not only unpredictable, but “opposes anything like a regular plan.”²⁷ Generals “do not make war with an abstraction but with a reality,” living, breathing, purposive agents in their own right.²⁸ This makes war more art than science.

FREE WILL

In CHAPTER 1, I argued that human beings do not blindly obey the laws of nature, but add their own causal power to the world. One expression philosophers have long used to explain this difference is that humans possess “free will”. This is merely conceptual short-hand for the idea that humans are free agents. This should be boringly true, to use Elster’s expression. But it remains a remarkably unpopular view among philosophers. This section expands upon Aristotle’s notion that humans are *primary movers unmoved*, which I argue should be the second guiding assumption in building a practical theory of preventive diplomacy.

The previous case studies have revealed an array of agents who were either unmoved or moved by other agents’ actions. I will return to the question of whether psychological pressures and coercion – staple diplomatic tactics – undermine an agent’s freedom to do otherwise. The previous case study chapters raised the question of why some leaders sometimes change their minds in the face of intense diplomatic and psychological pressure, while others do not. If the objective of preventive diplomacy is to compel an agent to give up the will to fight, this question is of real practical utility.

The archetypal *unmoved* agent, in the previous case studies, was Lincoln. During the 1860 secession crisis, Lincoln resisted intense pressures to accommodate the secessionist Southern states. Lincoln resisted when William Henry Seward urged him to desist. He resisted when Seward sent hundreds of influential business people to lobby him. Even when Lincoln appeared to be coming around to Seward’s view that compromise was necessary during the Fort Sumter incident, he resisted again, making his historic decision to relieve the fort. Lincoln is the archetypal unmoved agent.

When we ask what made Lincoln so inflexible, we meet at least three explanations: his ideological commitments; his belief that compromise might harm the Union; and his own strength

²⁴ “War is never solely directed against matter; it is always at the same time directed against the intelligent force which gives life to this matter,” even if the two are inseparable, Clausewitz writes. *Ibid.* 185.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.* 263.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 189.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 217.

of will. The first explanation, that Republican ideology, rigidly anti-slavery, determined Lincoln's rigidity is unpersuasive. Similar ideological commitments did not deter moderate Republicans from supporting a peaceful compromise. The second explanation is intriguing, revealing a different interpretation of Lincoln's stubbornness. In his inaugural address, we see a flexible Lincoln, not wishing to interfere with slavery, placing the military in a passive stance, reflecting on the futility of war.²⁹ However, we should recall that Seward strongly edited Lincoln's draft speech, which was initially more bellicose. A third possibility is that Lincoln was simply strong-willed. This seems unsatisfactory. After all, Count Tisza, whose will was notoriously strong, finally changed his mind after immense pressure from his colleagues. The answer must lie elsewhere.

The agents who *moved* after intense pressure in the above cases are numerous. Governor Fairfield saw war over the Aroostook Valley as inevitable and moved towards it – until General Scott persuaded him otherwise. Tisza was resolutely opposed to an Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia – until his colleagues finally bent him. Kaiser Wilhelm II desperately attempted to prevent war – until he felt betrayed by his cousin. The weak-willed Tsar managed to order a total halt of mobilisation – until his hawkish advisers convinced him to relaunch it two days later. Kivuitu vowed to resign to bring down the new government if it attempted to rig the election – before changing his mind after probably being threatened. The Abkhaz leader, Bagapsh, was open to a mediated compromise with Georgia to avoid war – until the Russian leadership undermined the German mediation. In all of these cases, the pattern is the same: powerful and often strong-willed agents resisted psychological pressure, before finally bowing to that same pressure. Of all these cases, that of Count Tisza serves as the paradoxical example of a moved agent.

I have already explored the question of why Tisza changed his position: a combination of his Germanophilia, sense of duty and pressure from his friends appear to have swayed him. However, this only answers why he changed his position; it does not answer why he did not resist. Paradoxically, both Lincoln and Tisza were notoriously stubborn, strong-willed and resistant to pressure, but one caved in and the other did not.³⁰ Theoretically, Lincoln and Tisza are comparable units. A counter-factual question helps to solve this apparent paradox.

To reconcile how agents can be either moved or unmoved by pressure, we need only imagine that we could strip Lincoln and Tisza of their personalities, character traits and lived experiences – everything which made them individuals. What would be left over from the individuality which clothed Lincoln's and Tisza's actions? There would, I argue, be nothing left. More precisely, there would be nothing besides "that original fountain and source of new things," which is the human

²⁹ Lincoln (1861).

³⁰ The only substantive difference is that, while Lincoln faced pressure not to do what he wanted to do, Tisza was pressured to do something he did not want to.

mind, or will.³¹ A compelling explanation for why some strong-willed individuals resist all pressures, where others crumble, is that each a sovereign agent. That is, each agent causes their own actions independently of external pressures. Agents may therefore be primary movers unmoved, actors whose actions are uncaused.

There is a common critique that agent-causal free will, to be possible, must be god-like. Admittedly, proponents of this viewpoint have sometimes encouraged the analogy.³² The philosopher, Simon Blackburn, has critiqued agent-causal free will. He sees this notion as representing a flawed Cartesian dualism, according to which our consciousness is a non-materialistic ‘ghost in the machine’. He rejected the view of the agent “deciding and choosing in complete independence of the causally connected events that make up physical nature.”³³

On this conception, it would be as if the subject stands outside nature, in some kind of vacuum beyond the reach of chemistry or physics, but then from that uncontaminated vantage point can decide to step in to make things happen, to twirl the knobs one way or the other... the free subject intervenes in the ongoing course of the world, but is herself not caused to do so one way or the other by events in that course.³⁴

This critique appears formidable. How, indeed, can an agent stand outside of nature and yet act causally within it? Upon closer inspection, this argument exaggerates what philosophers mean by agent-causation. Blackburn argues that there “must be events that influence the choosing agent.”³⁵ That is evidently the case. No defenders of free will have suggested that agents stood outside nature, and were not influenced by anything other than their own wills. Agents are certainly influenced and constrained by circumstances beyond their control, but their actions are not *determined* by them. This ‘ghost in the machine’ is a caricature, rather than representation of what we mean by free agency.

So much for the philosophy, but how does this translate into practical efforts to prevent war? To answer this question, we first return to the role of the will in war. “If we desire to defeat the enemy,” Clausewitz wrote, “we must proportion our efforts to his powers of resistance.”³⁶ That power to resist is reducible to two factors which “cannot be separated”: the material means, such as brute military strength, and “*the strength of the Will*.”³⁷ The latter “is always a factor in the product of force.”³⁸ An army’s objective is not only to exhaust the physical powers of an enemy’s force, but to undermine their will to fight.³⁹ The enemy’s will is not an entirely unknown quantity, but

³¹ Butterfield (1955: 11).

³² Spiering (2011: 352).

³³ Blackburn (2009: 29).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* 30.

³⁶ Clausewitz (1982: 104).

³⁷ Emphasis in original. *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* 115.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 128.

depends upon their object and determination.⁴⁰ Beyond this, the effects of an enemy's will "almost defy calculation".⁴¹ In the case of an army's defeat, for example, Clausewitz lay "special weight" on the causal role of moral forces, which

lead to greater losses in physical force, which then in turn react on the moral element, and so they go on mutually supporting and intensifying each other... [Until there exists a] state of mental tension not only of the Commander but of his whole Army down to the lowest wagon-driver, no doubt in decreasing strength but also in decreasing importance.⁴²

The effects of all military actions, to Clausewitz, are mediated by the minds of soldiers. It is precisely in such a context of mental pressure that the will plays a determining role. A proponent of causal determinism may criticise the above notion of moral forces as a form of Cartesian dualism.⁴³ This is not the case. Clausewitz repeats, on many occasions, that the material and the mental cannot be split, and that there is no point doing so in practice.⁴⁴ He distinguishes mental from physical forces to make the point that war is not necessarily won by the side with the most muscle power, but by that whose will to fight and mental acuity dominates. Physical force is "no more than the wooden handle, whilst the moral are the noble metal, the real bright-polished weapon."⁴⁵

This points to the clearest limitation on all diplomatic efforts to prevent war: consent. No war can be prevented without the tacit or explicit consent of the disputants. No political solution can be imposed without it. If a third-party *does* seek to impose it without consent, it is now at war with the disputants. Even in war, Clausewitz teaches us, one can win either by destroying the enemy down to the last person – which is extremely rare in history, and often practically impossible – or one can compel the enemy to submit to one's will, by conceding defeat. Therefore, the preventive actor must assume that disputants are in, principle, *primary movers unmoved*. I will return to this argument below, by exploring whether cases of coercion challenge this conclusion.

INDIVIDUALISM

This dissertation focussed narrowly on individuals attempting to prevent war. In CHAPTER 1, I justified this level of analysis by arguing that individuals are overlooked by IR theorists. I grounded this dissertation in the concept of *methodological individualism*, which takes all social events, including war, to be fully explainable with reference to individuals. I do not deny the immense historical influence of human collectivities. I deny that collectivities exercise causal powers which are more than the sum of their individual components. I now ask whether this argument is borne out by the facts of the case studies. I concede that it can never be empirically tested, since causes are

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 106.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 324.

⁴² *Ibid.* 336-337.

⁴³ See CHAPTER 1.

⁴⁴ He writes that "the effects of the physical forces and the moral are completely fused, and are not to be decomposed like a metal alloy by a chemical process." *Ibid.* 252.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 252.

not physically-observable. However, structural theories of war, I argue, impose order upon chaos at the cost of unjustified abstraction.

In the case of the Aroostook War (1838), I attributed the lack of an actual war to the mediation efforts of General Scott, as well as the consent of key Canadian and U.S. leaders. A structural explanation may stress that neither Britain nor the U.S. had an interest in major war after that of 1812. From this perspective, no serious threat to peace existed in 1838, and General Scott's mission does not suffice to explain the absence of war. This structural-level narrative erases crucial details of the case at hand. Firstly, this abstract level of analysis obscures the fact that both the British and American central governments did not fully control the situation on the ground. Most incidents were sparked by the actions of lumberjacks from Maine and New Brunswick. Secondly, both local leaders, Governors Fairfield and Harvey, were posturing for a fight. Finally, and crucially, the structural perspective misses the crucial role of General Scott and what he represented. As Scott realised, his reputation was one of his most important assets in defusing tensions. The structural level of analysis over-simplifies what was, in reality, a complex crisis playing out on multiple levels – international, national and local.

A brief counter-factual supports this point. Imagine that a younger William Henry Seward, who was then a prominent Whig senator in New York, had attempted to mediate the Aroostook crisis in 1838. This is not implausible, as Seward was a rising political star. In this scenario, a hypothetical Seward peace mission in 1838 would have likely failed. Seward did not possess Scott's nation-wide prestige. Neither could Seward have enjoyed anything approximating Scott's friendship with Governor Harvey of New Brunswick, whose life he had saved in 1812. Finally, Seward, a Whig politician, did not have the political impartiality necessary to mediate the local Whig-Democrat power struggle, which was Scott's most important move. For these reasons, Scott's intervention was arguably a necessary condition for the peaceful resolution of the Aroostook crisis. A structural level of analysis would miss this insight. The individual level of analysis fully accounts for the successful prevention of war.

Let us now turn to the second case study, when the same two personalities occupied centre stage. Historian John Ashworth rejected the argument that the actors in the 1861 crisis, and the errors they made, are to blame for the outbreak of the U.S. civil war. Instead, he argues that their "world views were structured by the social, political and economic conditions from which they sprang."⁴⁶ Ashworth suggests that the actors were not to blame for the war, since their actions sprang from "intractable economic (or moral) differences between North and South" and "Republican

⁴⁶ Ashworth (2012: 152).

ideology.”⁴⁷ The test of this structuralist argument is whether it provides a more coherent explanation for the outbreak of war than an agent-centric focus.

The structural explanation deflates the causal power of individuals like Lincoln, and empowers concepts such as “ideology” with the ability to act through individuals. From this perspective, Lincoln appeared beholden to Republican ideology. But this structural argument cannot explain why Seward, another Republican, broke the rigid constraints of this ideology. Seward, as we saw, attempted a peaceful reconciliation of Unionists and secessionists. In agent-causal terms, ideologies cannot exert control over human minds, since they cannot act at all. Evidently, agents may justify their actions with reference to ideologies, but may never outsource to them the moral responsibility and control of their actions.

In a counter-factual universe, Seward may have won the Republican nomination in 1860. President-elect Seward would have used his inauguration speech to promote a peaceful reconciliation of the Union. Seward’s efforts may not have sufficed to prevent the secessionist crisis. However, his strategy may have split the secessionist movement, and set the conditions for peaceful reintegration. A structural explanation of war cannot explain key causes of the war, such as the actions of Lincoln and thousands of forgotten hardliners in the North and South. Structural explanations legitimately stress the deep conditions which can set the stage for war – conflicting ideologies, economic systems and slavery. But none of these sufficed to cause the civil war in an intelligible way. A deep ideological divide, an intractable economic dispute, military mobilisation and immense social pressures for war *also* existed between Maine and New Brunswick in 1838. These structural conditions did not suffice to cause war then. Hence, agents may well be not the superficial, but the most direct causes of war and peace.

The First World War is often subjected to structural explanations. One theory holds that European powers failed to “efficiently” balance against Germany.⁴⁸ This argument accepts the logic of French and Russian statesmen in July 1914: had Britain clearly threatened to side with the Entente, war would never have occurred. This is a tempting thought experiment. However, there is merit to Sir Edward Grey’s defence that, had Britain done so, war could have just occurred sooner. Balance-of-power theory has had a long shelf life, and retains an aura of stately credibility. It seems inherently more acceptable to argue that geopolitical units – states, alliances, the international system – were responsible for the millions of deaths in the carnage which ensued. It seems, conversely, almost unbelievable that, had Sir Edward Grey spent less time fly-fishing at his country cottage, the First World War may never have occurred. But belief ought not to get in the way of the facts. And the facts lead us to the conclusion that Grey’s personality was so intrinsically tied to his

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 150-151.

⁴⁸ Mearsheimer (1990: 12, 22-23).

management of the July crisis, that another personality may have made *some* difference to the shape and outcome of the crisis.⁴⁹

One compelling thought experiment is to imagine, hypothetically, that Grey's character was much closer to that of the Hungarian president-elect, Count Tisza. Authoritarian, blunt in speech, fiery in temper, a British foreign secretary with these traits may have made a crucial difference. A Tisza in Grey's shoes may have better managed the crisis by simply speaking with clarity and urgency to other leaders. There can be no factual evidence that this approach would have worked. But there is a strong possibility it could have steered events in a different direction. If Grey's personality made a difference to the 1914 crisis, it is at best partial to conclude that structural forces such as alliances, train schedules and offensive war plans caused the war.⁵⁰ Structural explanations are invaluable in pointing out why the crisis occurred *as it did*, the constraints which leaders faced, and the speed at which it developed. But none of these factors were sufficient causes of war. It took imprudent leaders, punctual train drivers, inflexible generals and millions of obedient soldiers to translate these conditions into war.

Following the 2007 electoral violence which consumed Kenya, numerous Western journalists' accounts blamed timeless tribal hatreds for causing the violence. The unasked question, however, is what exactly caused such hatreds in the first place. As we saw, political and tribal leaders intentionally stoked hatred to gain political power. Individual agency comes back into the picture if we do not crop it chronologically. In this context, electoral violence was *likely* in 2007. But its likelihood was offset by factors which gave peace a chance: first and foremost, how the leaders would react to electoral defeat; secondly, how Kivuitu might react in the event of rigging; and thirdly, how individual citizens would react. Across these levels of agency – at the top, middle and base of politics – no particular outcome was pre-determined by structural forces alone. Even the masses of youth, many of whom rationally *chose* to participate in killings in exchange for money, were masters of their fates. Butterfield's comment on the role of everyday citizens in democracies, and in shaping historical events, is of particular relevance to the case of Kenya:

One of the difficulties of modern democracy is not that individuals matter less than before but that they tend to think they matter less. The responsibility is so dispersed that each man can close his eyes to the significance of his own part in the events that take place... [with] the consequence that wars may be caused, or empires fall, or civilizations decline, not necessarily through some colossal criminality in the first place, but from multitudinous cases of petty betrayal and individual neglect.⁵¹

This insight restores the individuality of violent masses. Even in the maelstrom of group violence, individuals made a crucial difference over life and death. One such individual was a lone police officer in Dandora, whom survivors singled out for bravely ordering his men to form a

⁴⁹ Lloyd George (1938: 55).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Van Evera (1984), Sagan (1986), Stevenson (1999).

⁵¹ Butterfield (1955: 6).

human barrier between Luo and Kikuyu combatants. This individual prevented massacres which other officers were abetting or ignoring.⁵² Thus, responsibility for the 2007 electoral violence was “dispersed” not only among the leaders, but among those who espoused hate speech, aided or participated in violence. In this context, it is obvious that Kivuitu does not bear the most important responsibility for the violence. If, as many suggest, he was under duress, we are not entitled to cast judgments on whether Kivuitu *should* have resigned after evidence of rigging became obvious. However, the fact stands that Kivuitu’s excruciating choice decisively influenced the course of events.

In 2008, the prominence of personality politics became clear in the muffled recriminations at UN headquarters over which individuals were appointed to prevent war. Here too, a structural explanation of the war would efface the importance of individual agents. It would be practically impossible to accurately explain the crisis in Russian-Georgian relations of 2006-2008 without mentioning the profound, mutual hatred between Saakashvili and Putin.⁵³ During President Sarkozy’s mediation, Putin reportedly threatened to hang Saakashvili by a certain body part.⁵⁴ Putin’s key demand for restoring diplomatic relations was officially that Saakashvili step down or, as Saakashvili claims, be killed or jailed.⁵⁵ Sarkozy’s own negotiating style may also explain the outcome of his mediation.⁵⁶ Finally, it was Steinmeier’s “condescending treatment” which the Abkhaz leaders deplored, rather than the content of any proposals he carried with him.⁵⁷ All of these tangled webs of inter-personal relationships, character traits and individual agents are lost at a higher level of analysis.

“What branch of human affairs is there,” Clausewitz asked, “in which these sparks of individual spirit have not made their appearance, surmounting all formal considerations?”⁵⁸ Individuals play a decisive role “both in the cabinet and in the field,” he thought.⁵⁹ It is precisely the “great diversity in mental individuality” which produces the multiple possible causal paths to war, and which gives such a prominent role to contingency.⁶⁰ “Personality matters” is a recurring observation among practitioners interviewed for this thesis. Fascinatingly, where many theorists see abstract concepts, practitioners see people, their careers, personalities and positions.⁶¹ The negotiation process

⁵² ICG (2008: 9).

⁵³ Putin was first infuriated by Saakashvili keeping him waiting during their first meeting in 2004, when Saakashvili reportedly lost track of the time while doing laps in his hotel pool. Levy (2008).

⁵⁴ Bedwell, Meyer and Tromm (2013).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ BBC (2010).

⁵⁷ Interview with Professor George Hewitt, honorary consul of Abkhazia in Great Britain, 18 August 2014.

⁵⁸ Clausewitz (1982: 129).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 188-189.

⁶¹ I gleaned this insight through approximately 40 interviews with policy-makers, and participant observation, at NATO Headquarters between September 2011-February 2012.

reinforces diplomats' view that humans, not acronyms, make decisions. One NATO diplomat reported on the intensely inter-personal aspect of negotiations with Russia:

They feel encircled in this way... They have to come from another planet, downtown somewhere, to a building that they don't know entirely – only to the conference rooms, and maybe the cafeteria. It's psychological, and I think it has an impact... We are people.⁶²

The diplomatic world is one in which individuals who often know one another personally eat, exercise, drink, work and gossip together. This world, in all its rich, complex, nuanced and human dimensions forms the everyday lives of diplomats and policy-makers. It is a world to which many theorists pay little attention. In the theoretical world, concepts, acronyms, structural forces, norms, classes, genders and ideologies are the main units of analysis. This dissertation has consistently stressed the importance of personalities in preventive diplomacy, and the primacy of the individual over higher forms of abstraction.

I now turn to three critiques of the above argument. Firstly, I explore the potential concern that such a theory revives the 'great man' view of history. Secondly, I concede that structural pressures inside an agent's mind may feasibly explain all of the above cases. However, since neither consciousness nor structural forces are observable, the choice is between two untestable alternatives. Finally, I use the case of the alleged coercion of Kivuitu to clarify the point that structures constrain but do not necessarily determine individuals' actions.

CONCESSIONS TO STRUCTURALISM

An intuitive reaction to the above is that it represents a resuscitated 'great man' view of history? Carr famously criticised the "cult of the individual", which he saw as "one of the most pervasive of modern historical myths."⁶³ Carr was scathing of the view that individuals are decisive causal agents, calling this the "Bad King John theory of history".⁶⁴ He argued that the "desire to postulate individual genius as the creative force in history is characteristic of the primitive stages of historical consciousness."⁶⁵ I will explore this critique below. Carr correctly repudiated the quaint view that *only* powerful leaders, and particularly men, make history. However, I argue that Carr conflated the role of 'great men' with that of the millions of individuals who make history.

Carr left no place for individuals in history, since he saw free will as juvenile.⁶⁶ He tried to mix freedom with determinism but,⁶⁷ like mixing fire and water, only ended up with the latter. Carr endorsed Hegel's remark that the "great man of the age is the one who can put into words the will

⁶² Interview with European diplomat at NATO headquarters.

⁶³ Carr (1963: 33).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 45.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 94.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 95

of his age, tell his age what its will is, and accomplish it.”⁶⁸ But this argument ignores the fact that politics is a contest of groups of individuals vying to define what the will of the collective *ought* to be. No historian can claim ever to know what “an age” wills, since an age *has* no will. In his haste to throw out ‘great men’, Carr threw out the agency of *all* individuals. His deterministic view of history could allow for no contingent events, which he dismissed as “irrelevant” not because they did not cause wars, but because they were unique and therefore not generalisable.⁶⁹ For example, the Ottoman emperor Bayezid was deterred from invading Europe by an attack of gout. But Carr dismissed Gibbon’s conclusion that such a chance event as a leader’s gout “may prevent or suspend the misery of nations.”⁷⁰ He did not see this episode as relevant, since gout is not a general cause of war.

The Marxist philosopher, Plekhanov, also tried to reconcile a structural deterministic view of history with human agency.⁷¹ He denied that history could be reduced to the conscious actions of individuals.⁷² Plekhanov’s doctrine boils down to the idea that, although individuals influence the course of history, this influence is “determined by the internal structure of that society”.⁷³ In short:

Owing to the specific qualities of their minds and characters, influential individuals can change the *individual features or events and some of their particular consequences*, but they cannot change their general *trend*, which is determined by other forces.⁷⁴

To explain this argument, Plekhanov uses the historical example of the Seven Years’ War, which was allegedly brought about by the pernicious influence of Louis XV’s mistress.⁷⁵ Rather than seeing this as evidence of a king’s mistress shaping history, Plekhanov sees her social position determining her influence. There is great merit to this argument, which I will return to below. Where the Marxist philosopher is less convincing is in attempting to explain why the king’s mistress, Madame de Pompadour, was able to withstand the pressure of other powerful people attempting to undermine her influence.⁷⁶ This is only mysterious because Plekhanov has committed to the view that she had no free will, but was merely acting out the role assigned to her by her social class, rather than individual consciousness.

The above critique of an individual level of analysis yields a very important nuance, which we may grant to structuralist theories without entailing determinism. In stark contrast to Carr, Plekhanov thought that individuals had a causal role to play in history. He even agreed that King

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 54.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 105-107.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 98.

⁷¹ The Marxist theory of history postulated an inevitable future event (a revolution). However, it still *needed* the actions of humans to bring it about, lest the inevitable event never occur. See Plekhanov (1976: 7-8, 11).

⁷² *Ibid.* 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 40.

⁷⁴ Emphasis in original. *Ibid.* 45.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 31.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 36.

Louis' lasciviousness was a cause of the Seven Years' War.⁷⁷ In fact, Plekhanov's view, if we discard its deterministic Marxist baggage, is a strong counter-point to the arguments I have advanced in this dissertation. Even if history is contingent, even if humans have free will, and even if individuals are among the major causes of war, the influence they wield is not determined by their will, but by the social influence of their positions. We see this nuance clearly in the six case studies above.

The agent-centric view of world politics is about *all* causally efficacious agents – that is, all humans with a capacity to reason. An agent need not occupy the highest throne of political power in order to exert influence upon history. In 1838, lumberjacks brought Britain and the U.S. to the brink of war over trees. In 1861, a handful of Federal troops at Fort Sumter deliberated on a decision which could have removed the catalyst of an incipient civil war. In 1914, a group of assassins were able to throw Europe into the most dangerous crisis in a generation. In 1954, domestic public opinion in the U.S. – the voices of millions – emboldened the U.S. president to take strong actions against Communist China. In Georgia, a handful of snipers in South Ossetia brought Georgia and Russia closer to war.

Plekhanov's critique allows us to bring nuance to the above idea, to avoid suggesting that *all* agents are equal in the causal power they bring to bear on world politics. This is clearly not the case. Theoretically, of course, all agents are equal. In practice, some are more equal than others. There are two reasons for the asymmetric power which agents exert in the world. The first is simply that some individuals have weaker or stronger wills than others. Compare Lincoln's steely resolve with Sir Edward Grey's indecisive nature, for example. Aside from this difference, Plekhanov points out a more practical difference. Simply put, not every strong-willed agent is in a social position of influence, and those agents who do impact historical events the most *do* tend to be more powerful. All six case studies in this dissertation confirm this point. The individuals who attempted to prevent war, and especially those who succeeded, enjoyed immense social and political influence. These individuals included a general, governors, foreign ministers, a Secretary-General of the UN, the Chairman of an electoral commission and a U.S. Assistant Secretary of State.

Thus, as Plekhanov concludes, "ever many [or woman] of talent who becomes a *social force*, is the product of *social relations*."⁷⁸ Were it not for the social trends and social power on which their influence rests, such agents "*would never have crossed the threshold that divides the potential from the real*."⁷⁹ Many talented individuals never become agents of social change, but are instead forgotten by history. Had Napoleon died prematurely, he would most likely have been replaced by

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

another talented and strong-willed individual.⁸⁰ To illustrate this point, imagine that two people announce a declaration of war: one man, standing on a soapbox in a public square, is met only with ridicule. The second woman, standing in the Oval Office, catalyses the movements of millions and propels nations to war. Across the two cases, both individuals were free agents, but the former enjoyed no social position allowing him to magnify his influence, whereas the latter did.

Plekhanov correctly pointed out that social relations may determine the *influence* of an agent's actions. But this in no way entails that social relations determine the *content* of that action. This nuance is important. In rejecting Plekhanov's deterministic streak, we also reject his idea that individuals only affect the individual features of events rather than their general trend. This view is entirely compatible with the classic statement that individuals "make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."⁸¹ This concession reconciles social structure with the causal power of agents since social relations, in themselves, do not determine human action.⁸² This discussion has rehabilitated what Carr threw out with the 'great man' view of history: the fact that individuals do cause and prevent wars, and that some individuals are simply more influential in their efforts to do so due to social position.

This conclusion does not present a revived 'great man' view of history. Instead, it suggests an individual-centric view which argues that all people carry equal causal power, which is unequal in its influence. Nevertheless, the influence of any citizen's actions can be magnified by the contingency of history. "The levers and pulleys in the historical process work so trickily," Butterfield argues, that mere trifles may have an incalculable "magnified effect".⁸³ History "represents a field in which big decisions can be carried by a narrow margin."⁸⁴ The hijackers of September 11, 2001 come to mind, as does the name of Mohammed Bouazizi.⁸⁵ Even politically weak individuals can force disproportionate change, especially when they choose to go "against the crowd".⁸⁶

This conclusion sides with Plekhanov, rather than Carr, in seeing contingent events – shrieking owls, flasks of whiskey, gout and mistresses – as possible contributing causes to wars. Another critic wrote that only "simple souls...take apparent and superficial causes of wars for their real causes."⁸⁷ He mocked causal explanations for the French conquest of Algeria which mentioned the

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 46-47.

⁸¹ Karl Marx, cited in Claus and Marriott (2013: 86).

⁸² Elder-Vass (2010: 23).

⁸³ Butterfield (1955: 6).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 8.

⁸⁵ Fisher (2011).

⁸⁶ Butterfield (1955: 6).

⁸⁷ Devaldes (1925).

fact that the Algerian ruler had struck the French consul with a fan.⁸⁸ Carr would ignore such events, since striking a diplomat with a fan is not a timeless cause of war. Tolstoy also mocked explanations for war which focussed on individuals and contingencies and, like Carr, searched for the order, meaning, and deeper causes in history.⁸⁹ To these thinkers, individuals and contingencies were only trifles in history, not its real causes. However, it is only because Carr and Tolstoy were committed to determinism, and assumed that history *had* to obey a certain order and *had* to have a deeper meaning, that they downplayed the role of individuals. I conclude that history may have no broader meaning or governing logic, and that trifles, contingencies and individuals all truly affect war and peace.

This concession to structural theories of war entails another, which adds a crucial nuance to the thesis that agents and minor incidents may cause wars, due to the contingency of history. Contingency cuts both ways. Even though an individual who makes a conscious choice may be the *cause* of their action, they may not cause the *consequences* of that action. While common-sensical, the implications of this concession are far-reaching for IR theorists and historians. Scholars looking back upon history, according to an historian of the American civil war, “try to be rational beings and tend to write about history as if it were a rational process.” This, he suggests, is problematic:

they number the alternatives, and talk about choices and decisions, and equate decisions with what the decisions led to. But if we examine the record of modern wars, it would seem that the way people get into a war is seldom by choosing it; usually it is by choosing a course that leads to it – which is a different thing altogether.⁹⁰

Ironically, the contingent and open-ended nature of history – if we accept that it is such – leads us to conclude that leaders and agents *cannot possibly* control the consequences of their actions. This is a sobering and important reminder to diplomatic practitioners, and it is a crucial nuance for any agent-centric theory of preventive diplomacy. This concession implies the frightful admission that

one can get into a war without in any way foreseeing it or imagining it, which is easy. But to avert a war successfully, it has to be foreseen or imagined, which is quite difficult.⁹¹

The above does not entail that structural-deterministic theories of war are true by any means. But it does suggest that even perfectly free and rational leaders, in full control of their faculties, who make a conscious choice without intending it to escalate tensions, may easily and inadvertently do so.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Tolstoy dismissed historians’ accounts of wars which centred on individuals and leaders. “When asked ‘What is the power that moves people?’,” Tolstoy noted, “modern history laboriously replies either that Napoleon was a great genius, or that Louis XIV was very proud, or that certain writers wrote certain books. He thought it absurd that “modern history, like a deaf man, answers questions no one has asked.” Tolstoy (2009: 446).

⁹⁰ Potter (1972: 321).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

This is a humbling point, and one which influences the practical conclusions in the next chapter. I now turn to another possible critique of this dissertation.

FREEDOM IN COERCION?

A second critique of the above arguments is that agents appear to act in a psychological vacuum – affected by weak external pressures, which they effortlessly overcome. Such agents, a critic might charge, have nothing to do with the imperfect human beings in world politics who may be swayed, influenced or coerced. Real people, leaders, diplomats, generals must make decisions in conditions of uncertainty and great stress, with imperfect information and while enemy armies mobilise at great speeds. In sum, *real-life* agents do not have the luxury of the philosopher’s calm, composed, hyper-rational agent. I will now explore this critique. I will use the case of Samuel Kivuitu’s crucial decision in 2007 to argue that, Kivuitu, a real-life agent, can still logically be said to have acted freely, even under duress.

In this debate, coercion is a paradigmatic case. If a free agent were able to act one way or another *despite* external coercion, we could expect them to resist weaker pressures. As an example, I will explore the role of coercion in influencing Kivuitu in 2007. Philosophers generally agree that agents, when acting under coercion, are excused of some degree of *moral responsibility*.⁹² However, it is much more contested whether coercion “constrains individual freedom and undermines individual autonomy.”⁹³ Defining coercion helps to shine light on this problem. For an agent to effectively coerce another agent, there must be “a coercive will”.⁹⁴ That is, an effective case of coercion must include three key ingredients. Firstly, a coercer must desire to bend the will of his or her victim.⁹⁵ Secondly, the coercer must be prepared to act on this desire. Finally, the coercer must successfully bend the victim’s will to his or her will through psychological compulsion.⁹⁶ With these definitions in mind, we can proceed.

The first question we must answer is whether Kivuitu was coerced to announce in December 2007. Secondly, if he was coerced, we must ask whether Kivuitu could still have done otherwise. Regarding the first question, details are scant, so we must rely on the corroborated suspicion that Kivuitu was personally threatened to announce the results of the 2007 election. The choice Kivuitu would have faced, in this situation, is clear: comply, knowing it might spark violence; or defect, and risk endangering his family. This situation clearly matched the first two elements of the above definition of coercion. However, the missing element is compliance. Even in this extreme case, it

⁹² Harry Frankfurt made a seminal critique of this broad consensus. See Frankfurt (1969).

⁹³ Arnold (2001: 54).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 56.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 57.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

took the voluntary movement of *Kivuitu's own* will to successfully coerce him. A coercer's desire, therefore, "can only be fulfilled through the will of another person."⁹⁷

The question of moral responsibility is independent from that of free agency.⁹⁸ While a threat to Kivuitu's person would diminish his moral responsibility, it would not necessarily diminish his *agency*. In similar situations, other agents have resisted coercion in acts of defiance or despair. "The act of choosing under circumstances of extraordinary duress," Arnold concludes, "is an assertion of power in the face of powerlessness."⁹⁹ Successful coercion does not destroy or take control of another's will. An agent effectively faces an unsavoury choice, but a choice nevertheless. To be clear, I am not arguing that Kivuitu *should* have acted differently. Rather, I am arguing that Kivuitu *could* still have defied his coercer's attempts to influence his will. So long as Kivuitu was not "physically compelled"¹⁰⁰ – his limbs tied, his mouth gagged, his liberty constrained – he was still able to act otherwise.

Real humans, like Lincoln and Tisza, have reacted extremely differently under conditions of intense external psychological pressure. As I showed with reference to Kivuitu above, attempted coercion does not impair an agent's ability to do otherwise. Kivuitu's grim choice represents the "inequalities of fortune" which leaders face in world politics.¹⁰¹ As Richard Holton concludes, a "coerced action is *a free action*, but it is either justifiable or excusable."¹⁰² This implies that humans retain their agency and freedom in the face of lower order psychological pressures. Agents are, in principle, free to resist such pressures, even unto death. "Come and take them," as King Leonidas famously replied when the Persian sovereign instructed his army to lay down their arms.¹⁰³ This demonstrates that there is a degree of consent in all successful coercion.

Finally, the above conclusion helps us to feel the outer ring of possibility which agents face in attempting to prevent war. Often, the most solid brick wall which diplomats are likely to encounter is the iron-clad will of a committed agent. In other words, a committed Lincoln and a committed Tisza can make all the difference in world history, by blocking or facilitating efforts to prevent war. This reality is reinforced when, unlike historians, diplomats are forced to face the future with no hindsight, poor foresight and only awareness of the key decision-makers.¹⁰⁴ This conclusion may appear to suggest that if world leaders are truly primary movers unmoved, influencing their decisions would be close to impossible. Their psychological defences would appear unassailable to

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 57.

⁹⁸ Arnold defends this separation in *Ibid.* 54.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 58.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 55.

¹⁰¹ Cited in Murphy (1981: 82).

¹⁰² See Holton (2007: 7).

¹⁰³ *Molon labe*, in Ancient Greek.

¹⁰⁴ This situation greatly resembles the friction of war, according to Clausewitz, in part due to the commander's ignorance of the enemy's presence, intentions, and the imperfection of all information. See Clausewitz (1982: 115).

the humble diplomat. This concern is unwarranted. That agents are primary movers unmoved does not imply that influence is impossible, only that it is extraordinarily difficult. This, to me, appears to be a rather representative view of foreign affairs. In the above cases, each attempt to prevent war encountered extraordinary friction in the shape of other agents. Free agency helps to explain the real-life difficulty of preventive diplomacy.

AGENCY IS UNOBSERVABLE

The above theoretical arguments hinge upon the premise that events which lead to wars are caused by purposive agents, and spring from their minds. However, this is an assumption which – like causation – we can only infer from nature. As Clausewitz wrote, “the intelligent forces are only visible to the inner eye”.¹⁰⁵ This has important implications for preventive diplomacy, if its aim is to influence the wills of conscious agents. We can only infer that consciousness exists from the outward behaviour of agents. Descartes pondered whether the hats and cloaks he saw outside his window “might cover artificial machines, whose motions might be determined by springs.”¹⁰⁶ Like Descartes,¹⁰⁷ Clausewitz invites us to use our judgment to assume that the beings we observe in war are not automatons, but conscious beings.

A critic may charge that an agent-centric bias was front-loaded in CHAPTER 1, and pre-determined the conclusion I would reach regardless of the empirical cases. This reveals a potential objection to the use of historical examples to illustrate a philosophical argument. The problem is as follows: the concept of structure, which I have consistently critiqued, is also invisible to the eye.¹⁰⁸ It, *too*, is only inferred to causally determine the actions of human beings from their behaviour. In Giddens’ formulation, social structure is not something which exists in the outside world, but exerts causal power *through* the consciousness of individuals.¹⁰⁹ In this regard, two competing accounts of the origins of the human behaviour leading to war – individual consciousness or structure – are on even footing. This leads Colin Wight to critique any attempt to “settle the matter in advance of concrete research”.¹¹⁰ Wight argues that the question of how much structural or individual factors determine social outcomes is an *empirical* one, rather than a philosophical one.

Since agency and structure are both invisible, I concede that all of the previous case studies might be explained by structural forces acting *through* the consciousness of agents. Objectively, there is no factual basis to choose either way. But this admission reveals a weakness in Wight’s argument. Since both consciousness and structures are unobservable, how can historians possibly

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 185.

¹⁰⁶ Descartes (2008: 84).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Wight (2006: 122).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 142-143.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 101.

study either concept? Science does not offer a solution either. Brain scans are crude instruments, depicting the physiological traces of mental activity. One day, a ‘mind scanner’ may be invented allowing social scientists to observe the mental events which individuals like James Blunt experience: their thoughts, beliefs and volitions.¹¹¹ On that day, it *may* be possible to objectively distinguish between structural forces and an agent’s own consciousness. Until then, this debate will remain irreducibly metaphysical. The question of whether wars are caused by conscious human beings, unconscious agents acting out structural forces, or a mysterious blend of agency and structure cannot be tested empirically. An answer can only be deduced by constructing the most plausible explanation of historical efforts to prevent war. This dissertation sought to provide one such agent-centric answer. I leave readers to judge the outcome of this attempt.

This discussion has practical implications beyond academic circles. It leads us to a crucial assumption for the practice of preventive diplomacy. What Clausewitz wrote on causation in war may inform practitioners attempting to control its causes:

events are seldom fully known, and still less motives, as the latter have been, perhaps purposively, concealed by the chief actor, or have been of such a transient and accidental character that they have been lost for history.¹¹²

The conscious desires of leaders and generals are often hidden from plain sight, since “no human eye can trace the thread of the necessary connexion of events up to the determination of...Princes.”¹¹³ There is “nothing objective intervening” between a Prince’s volition and their action which the scientist may grasp.¹¹⁴ An easy solution to this problem is to conclude, like Tolstoy, that these desires are trifles. This in no way helps practitioners, who cannot dismiss volitions as trifles, since they know from experience that “however small a cause may be in itself, its effects reach to the end...and modify or influence the final result in some degree,” in diplomacy as in war.¹¹⁵

We can draw another practical conclusion from this theoretical discussion. Invisible though it may be, consciousness, from which agency springs, is more than a trifling cause of war: it may be *the* fundamental cause of war. Power transitions, strategic competitions, alliances, poverty, ideology and crises are always mediated by consciousness. Not all power transitions end in war; not all hostile alliance systems cause wars; and not all countries with disparities in wealth are plagued by violent conflict. In contrast, most wars reflect, in the context preceding them, conscious agents vying to bring it about, or prevent it. Evidently, structural conditions – as I conceded above – may explain why the war of July 1914 had such destructive and far-reaching *consequences*. These

¹¹¹ Such a machine is only impossible if, like committed materialists, one denies the reality of such conscious mental states.

¹¹² Clausewitz (1982: 115).

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 227.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 228.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 214.

consequences were certainly not the result of a conscious choice. But the causal power which sparked the war cannot be attributed to the structures themselves, just as a pile of gunpowder cannot ignite itself.

A major implication of this dissertation is that the wills of other agents are the most constraining forces facing any leader in a crisis. Paradoxically, free will not only empowers agency; it also constrains it. In which ratio, and to which extent, no one knows exactly. And that is exactly the job of diplomats: to feel the outer limits of the possible, delimited by the wills of others, to act within those confines, and to renegotiate them when possible. But other human beings are arguably the only natural limits of the art of the possible. These limits are not static, but are constantly changing, opportunities opening and closing, as the actions of individuals interact in a kaleidoscopic show of free will, agency and contingency.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the theoretical implications of this dissertation for the role of human agency in efforts to prevent war. Drawing on the philosophical and historical insights of this thesis, I articulated general conclusions on the role of agency in efforts to prevent war. For now, these conclusions are largely theoretical. However, as I argued in CHAPTER 1, our analysis of the causes of war directly affects policy prescriptions to prevent it. If the above discussion misled policy-makers into assuming that gout caused wars, and devoted resources to combat this imaginary threat to world peace, the social consequences might be measured in human lives. This example is absurd, but the real-life implications are not. In the next chapter, I sketch the embryonic form of a practical theory of preventive diplomacy, drawn from the above conclusions. Our military guide, Carl von Clausewitz, leads us to consider how the military arts may serve to inform the diplomatic arts. Specifically, I seek to demonstrate how the method of military contingency-planning may serve the cause of peace.

Towards a Practical Theory

“As the human eye in a dark room dilates
its pupil, draws in the light that there is,
partially distinguishes objects by degrees...
so it is in War with the experienced soldier,
whilst the novice is only met by pitch black.”
- Clausewitz¹

We now leave abstractions behind, not because they are useless, but precisely because the philosophical ground we have covered allows us to engage fully with its practical implications. In this final chapter, I invite scholars and practitioners to engage with the question of how we should go about attempting to prevent an incipient war. What are the practical lessons from this study? This chapter draws out the real-life, practical implications of this dissertation. It also serves as an executive summary of my research findings for policy-makers and scholars.

The last chapter synthesised various conclusions from the philosophical and historical parts of this dissertation. In this chapter, I propose tentative features of a *practical theory* of preventive diplomacy. “[I]nstead of a finished building of theory, there are only materials” to be found in the present treatise.² Concretely, this chapter proposes a practical methodology to aid practitioners to plan and carry out preventive diplomacy. I first begin by reiterating what a practical theory is, and what a finished one might resemble. Secondly, I draw on the military art of contingency-planning to advance debate. Finally, I draw practical lessons for preventive diplomacy from this dissertation. I must begin by exploring how two words which are often held to be antonyms – practice and theory – can possibly work together. Clausewitz explained how theory could be practical.

WHAT IS A PRACTICAL THEORY?

I have already laid out the reasons, in the last chapter, for which Clausewitz’s *On War* is a useful theoretical guide. In this section, I set out the principles which can guide our efforts to craft a practical theory of preventive diplomacy. As we saw in the *Introduction*, the literature on preventive diplomacy has not developed a coherent theoretical statement. At best, theorists have proposed generic advice to policy-makers, such as:

“Act early!”

“Study the conflict!”

“Consult with those involved on the ground!”³

“Act as early as possible, preferably even before a triggering event has occurred.”⁴

¹ Clausewitz (1982: 91).

² *Ibid.* 91.

³ Michael Lund (2002: 169) quotes these maxims, critiquing them as platitudes.

⁴ Wallensteen (1998: 15) and DFAT (1999: 70).

“It is important to develop norms, institutions and instruments relating to strengthening societal structures, in particular, democratic institutions, judicial bodies and civil society in general.”⁵

As Stedman wrote, the urge to “do something, anything” is evident in the early literature on preventive diplomacy.⁶ Wallensteen and Möller argue that “it is now time to be more nuanced and ask which actions by whom are more likely to get an effective response.”⁷ In response, scholars have called for context-specific strategies of preventive diplomacy.⁸ Others have identified the need for contingency “action plans” based on empirical case studies.⁹ However, the strategic planning of diplomatic actors, such as the UN, remains “rudimentary” at best.¹⁰ This is where Clausewitz can help.

Clausewitz’s *On War* has been described as a remarkably “practical theory of war”.¹¹ I define a practical theory as a coherent chain of concepts designed to assist the judgments of practitioners. This is the manner in which Clausewitz envisaged the utility of theory for practitioners. His theory of war was based on at least three major assumptions about the relation of theory to practice. The first assumption is that, in the art of war, “experience counts for more than any number of abstract truths.”¹² A good theorist, he said,

is like a swimming master, who teaches on dry land movements which are required in the water, which must appear grotesque and ludicrous to those who forget about the water. This is also why theorists, who have never plunged in themselves, or who cannot deduce any generalities from their experience, are unpractical and even absurd, because they only teach what everyone knows...¹³

Such a theory ought to bridge the philosophical and practical worlds of international politics.¹⁴ A practitioner “should never use the results of theory as laws or standards but only...as the soldier does – as aids to judgment.”¹⁵ Clausewitz rejected the idea that theorists could deduce specific courses of action from general principles, as if derived from a “truth machine”.¹⁶ He warned against the “mechanical application of theory”.¹⁷ This means avoiding the search for “certain and positive” maxims.¹⁸ At best, such a theory must only attempt “to distinguish from amongst the endless

⁵ Bjurner (2002: 290).

⁶ Stedman (1995: 17).

⁷ Wallensteen and Möller (2004: 3).

⁸ Cockell (2002: 187), Ackermann (2003: 343), Stewart (2003: 12).

⁹ *Ibid.* and Ackermann (2003: 343).

¹⁰ Cited in *Ibid.* 191.

¹¹ Honig (1997: 112).

¹² *Ibid.* 31.

¹³ Clausewitz (1982: 165-166).

¹⁴ Just as plants only bear fruits when they are trimmed, he wrote in another metaphor, “so in the practical arts the theoretical leaves and flowers must not be made to sprout too far, but be kept near to experience, which is their proper soil.” *Ibid.* 167.

¹⁵ See Howard (2002: 32).

¹⁶ Clausewitz (1982: 195).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 212.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

connexions of events those which are really essential.”¹⁹ Applying this theory must be left to each practitioner’s judgment.

What such a theory is *not*, as should be clear, is a guide which diplomats ought to consult in a crisis. A practical theory should “educate the mind of the future leader...but not accompany him to the field of battle.”²⁰ Diplomats should not apply truth from “dusty books”²¹ like “mental appliances”.²² A practical theory is, at its core, about the power of knowledge:

The moral reaction, the ever-changeable form of things, makes it necessary for the chief actor to carry in himself the whole mental apparatus of his knowledge, that everywhere and at every pulse-beat he may be capable of giving the requisite decision from himself. Knowledge must, by this complete assimilation with his own mind and life, be converted into real power.²³

Such knowledge must permeate the agent’s mind. “Science must become art,” Clausewitz writes.²⁴ He stressed that military exercises, while useful, were ultimately a weak substitute for actual military experience.²⁵ A practical theory, it might be objected, simply instructs policy-makers to learn from experience. This is true. For Clausewitz, practice ought to be the basis of all theories of real-life utility. However, a practical theory is about more than experiencing diplomacy or war for oneself. It is about ordering the chaos of experience in a logical, concise and policy-relevant way. This is where theorists can help. In this chapter, I aim to offer the foundations of such a theory. I will begin by arguing that diplomats can learn from the military arts.

LEARNING FROM THE MILITARY ARTS

At first sight, the military may seem a counter-intuitive inspiration for preventive diplomacy. Military planning brings to mind the rigid, self-fulfilling European wars plans of 1914. With hindsight, war plans often attain an absurd character. Until 1939, for example, U.S. *War Plan Red* prepared for a global confrontation with the British Empire.²⁶ Similarly, Canada’s *Defence Scheme No. 1* planned a pre-emptive invasion of the U.S.²⁷ But contingency planning remains a cornerstone of military preparations in peace-time. Chinese and American defence planners have prepared for war against the other since the 1950s.²⁸ Military planning follows the Roman proverb: if you want peace, prepare for war.²⁹ Scholars, as I mentioned above, have called for context-specific plans of preventive diplomacy. This ambition is precisely where the academic literature may make the most

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 218.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 191.

²¹ *Ibid.* 199.

²² *Ibid.* 228.

²³ *Ibid.* 200.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 167.

²⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff (1930).

²⁷ Godefroy (2005: 105).

²⁸ This paragraph draws from Morini (2011).

²⁹ Sumner (1911).

practical difference in the conduct of preventive diplomacy. To date, the practical advice of the academic literature largely resembles that of poet Joseph Malins:

Then an old sage remarked: 'It's a marvel to me
that people give far more attention
to repairing results than to stopping the cause,
when they'd much better aim at prevention'.³⁰

While intuitive, the advice to act early is of little practical use. The military tradition offers a practical guide to diplomatic practitioners on how to plan for and execute preventive missions. As one NGO official noted, conflict prevention ought to “take a page out of the military.”³¹ The rest of this chapter seeks to propose a model for planning and carrying out preventive diplomacy. Machiavelli gives a vivid depiction of the military art of contingency planning. The ancient Greek statesman and general Philopoemon, Machiavelli noted, was a model military planner:

in times of peace he was always thinking of methods of warfare, so that when walking in the country with his friends he would often stop and talk with them on the subject. 'If the enemy,' he would say, 'were posted on that hill, and we found ourselves here with our army, which of us would have the better position? How could we most safely and in the best order advance to meet them? If we had to retreat, what direction should we take? If they retired, how should we pursue?'

Philopoemon, while perhaps a dull friend, was a brilliant military mind for one reason. He did not plan for *a* war; he planned for *any* war imaginable:

In this way he put to his friends, as he went along, all the contingencies that can befall an army. He listened to their opinions, stated his own, and supported them with reasons; and from his being constantly occupied with such meditations, it resulted, that when in actual command no complication could ever present itself with which he was not prepared to deal.³²

Similarly, for Clausewitz strategic planning had to be as consequentialist as war itself.³³ “Every major war plan grows out of so many *individual* circumstances,” he wrote, “that it is impossible to devise a hypothetical case with such specificity that it could be taken as real.”³⁴ Clausewitz’s theory of war was a reaction to deterministic theories of war. His contemporaries, including Napoleon, held the erroneous view that the “science of war consists of effectively calculating all the chances first and then working out exactly, mathematically, the part which luck will play.”³⁵ Clausewitz’s approach to military planning has three essential features: foresight, dynamism and flexibility.

³⁰ Malins (1895).

³¹ Brand-Jacobsen (2012).

³² Machiavelli (1513).

³³ Strachan (2011: 1287).

³⁴ Or, in the words of a later general: “One does not prepare for war in general, but for a specific war...” Cited in *Ibid.* 1288-1289.

³⁵ Cited in *Ibid.* 1295.

Military planning, to be useful, necessitates a prescient degree of foresight.³⁶ Foresight can be defined as a type of “mental time travel”.³⁷ This accords with the concept of *prudence*. The Ancients saw this as the virtue which “regulates the present, foresees the future and remembers the past.”³⁸ Philopoemon’s example can inspire a prudential approach to preventive diplomacy. Such foresight is a crucial means to winning a contest of wills. As in chess, a strong player foresees moves and counter-moves numerous rounds ahead of time, and adapts to the other player’s actual moves.

Dynamism is the second core element of useful military plans. A theory of war which aspires to mathematical certainties, Clausewitz thought, “is of no practical use.”³⁹ What gives war its inherent dynamism is the bold, rash, unpredictable “human element”.⁴⁰ In sum, war is dynamic because “the enemy gets a vote,” as a U.S. general said.⁴¹ Failures in military planning arose from the misguided assumption that the enemy’s will was a known quantity.⁴² For example, U.S. nuclear plans during the Cold War failed “to appreciate sufficiently that the enemy was a reactive entity, whose aim was to frustrate the other side’s plans, not to fall in with them.”⁴³ Military plans which assumes an essentially static, black-and-white, deterministic world are likely to fail.⁴⁴ Real war, unlike war on paper, is dynamic.

This dynamic is not only evident in war. Military brinkmanship in a crisis “tends to develop a momentum of its own,” as Thomas Schelling wrote.⁴⁵ This momentum, however, derives not from structural forces, but from the iterative actions of political, diplomatic and military actors.⁴⁶ According to Schelling, it is “our sheer inability to predict the consequences of our own actions...and the enemy’s similar inability” which injects risk into a crisis.⁴⁷ Crises demonstrate the cumulative, constraining effect of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. All sound military plans must reckon with the inherently dynamic, constraining role of an adversary’s decisions.

The action-reaction cycle in war leads to the third principle of successful military plans: flexibility. As General Jim Molan wrote, “military planning must retain an *infinite* flexibility.”⁴⁸

³⁶ The popular spatial metaphor of time “as a stream or something in continuous and uniform motion” is misleading, as Collingwood argued, because “the events of the future do not really wait their turn to appear...they do not exist at all, and therefore cannot be grouped in any order whatsoever.” R. G. Collingwood, cited in Ferguson (2011a: 49).

³⁷ Raby and Clayton (2009: 314-315).

³⁸ Cited Lipsius (2004: 285).

³⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Mattis (2010).

⁴² Strachan (2011: 1290).

⁴³ *Ibid.* 1292.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 1292-1293.

⁴⁵ 49

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 97.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 109.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 1294.

Von Moltke the Elder, whose advice the German general staff failed to heed in 1914, famously said that no plan survives contact with the enemy.⁴⁹ Clausewitz also argued that chance and human agency dictated that a commander would need to adapt to changing situations.⁵⁰ In the maelstrom of chance, human agencies and friction, a successful commander would need “an intellect which, even in the midst of this intense obscurity, is not without some traces of inner light... and then the courage to follow this faint light.”⁵¹ This gut feeling, or professional judgment, should be sovereign. Having established how the military arts can inform diplomatic efforts to prevent war, I now turn to the crux of this chapter. I propose a method of contingency planning for such missions, built on the theoretical conclusions of the last chapter

A FIVE-POINT PLAN

Having established the assumptions of a practical theory of preventive diplomacy, I will now sketch an example of how it can be used to develop a diplomatic action plan. A lasting practical theory of preventive diplomacy can only be written by a practitioner with a wealth of experience. In the meantime, this chapter seeks to show how the conclusions of this dissertation *could* be applied in a practical scenario. Policy recommendations can only be derived from an understanding of the specific context of an actual crisis. Hence, this section will “individualize the conception”, so that it does not “dissolve into a generalization.”⁵² I therefore anchor this chapter to a specific crisis scenario.

I now set out a diplomatic mission in response to a fictitious crisis scenario around the disputed Senkaku-Diaoyu islands. These rocky outcrops in the East China Sea, solely inhabited by goats and moles, are administered by Japan and claimed by China. Between 2012 and 2014, increasing confrontations between both powers fed talk of possible war.⁵³ Many analysts predicted that such a war would almost inevitably involve the United States.⁵⁴ I now expand on this scenario by hypothesising a dangerous new bout of escalation in 2015. The basic scenario I propose is a surprise occupation of the contested islands by Chinese civilian protestors under the cover of darkness. This is a plausible scenario, which would place Japanese decision-makers in the position of either accepting this *fait accompli* or risking conflict with China.⁵⁵ I will focus on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s potential actions to prevent war.

⁴⁹ Cited in *Ibid.* 1290.

⁵⁰ See *Ibid.*; and Clausewitz (1982:141).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Clausewitz (1982: 365, 179).

⁵³ See Glaser (2012), Holmes (2012), Beech (2013).

⁵⁴ See, for example Holmes (2012), White (2014).

⁵⁵ After gaming various scenarios on the Senkaku-Diaoyu dispute for the course *POLS3202: Foreign Policies of the Great Powers*, this type of non-military occupation seemed the most likely.

1. Buy time

History is full of ‘inevitable wars’ which never occurred.⁵⁶ Since tomorrow does not yet exist, Ban Ki-moon still has time, and can potentially buy more. As one statesman noted, “the first 24, 48 or 72 hours are critical.”⁵⁷ But in a crisis, time is not a finite substance, like so many grains of sand, counting down to some inevitable event. It is misleading to think of crises being governed by a mechanical countdown to war. If this device existed, the value it displays would jump erratically from hours, to seconds, to minutes, based on no higher law than the interactions of the key decision-makers. Time, in a crisis, is relative to the actors: the perceived time pressures in Beijing and Tokyo, the media’s attention, the sailing distance of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, etc. Ban Ki-moon’s *own* actions will causally affect the nature and duration of the crisis.

Buying time might mean nothing more than the humble diplomatic ritual of urging restraint on all sides. But there are more sophisticated tactics. The first is to tie up the key players in diplomatic procedures which may slow down their decision-making process. In 1838, General Scott injected himself into the middle of partisan politics in Maine’s capital, physically co-locating his office within the governor’s own. This ensured that he had access to key decision-makers, and could drag out discussions by virtue of being physically present on the ground. Dag Hammarskjöld used a similar tactic in his mission to China in 1955, giving him influence over the tempo of events by simply interceding at a delicate moment in the crisis.

In a hypothetical Senkaku-Diaoyu crisis, the Secretary-General may have several tactics at his disposal. The first could be to dispatch a Special Envoy to East Asia, on a quiet mission to ensure that Sino-Japanese crisis communication continued unimpeded during the crisis. In support of this mission, Ban Ki-moon may call the national leaders of both states at crucial turning points when diplomatic failure threatened. The Secretary-General would likely seek to enmesh the parties in diplomatic rituals, processes and initiatives – official and unofficial – to attempt to buy as much time as possible by delaying each side’s final decision.

2. Move individuals to move the whole

Ban Ki-moon would know, from experience, that people are the hinges of war and peace. Governments, businesses, international organisations construct a façade of unity. Constitutions and mission statements exist to give the appearance of an unbroken social whole, where only individuals exist. Talking points give the impression of unity, where none exists naturally. Like actors on a stage, officials repeat lines they may or may not believe, not only to convince others, but

⁵⁶ Courtney (1908: 213-214).

⁵⁷ Rudd (2010).

to convince themselves, that they are part of a greater body of men, women, one of higher purpose than the mere pushes and pulls of individual ambitions.

Political, psychological and diplomatic constraints inevitably limit the scope of Japanese and Chinese leaders' manoeuvring room, and Ban Ki-moon's own.⁵⁸ However, the seemingly uncontrollable forces facing him, when disaggregated, are merely the cumulative sum of individual actors and decisions.⁵⁹ It is therefore to individuals that he must look. Ban Ki-moon should attempt to behold the tapestry of internal factions in both Japan and China, in all their details, mentally divide this sea of actors into power factions, then sub-divide these down to the single atom of individual human beings. This is practically impossible to know in the imperfect world of practitioners. In practice, the Secretary-General need not worry about all the possibly relevant agents. Cognitive, time and budgetary constraints will force him to perform *triage*. At minimum, Ban Ki-moon should write a shortlist of key decision-makers in the crisis.⁶⁰

In the July 1914 crisis, as we saw above, Sir Edward Grey conceived of the crisis in terms of groups of hawks and doves vying for control of foreign policy in various capitals, especially Berlin. This is a realistic a model of foreign policy decision-making, particularly in crises. Some actors on the scene, or behind them, pursue personal and national agendas, some leading to confrontation, others to compromise. The key, therefore, is to clearly identify which actors are pursuing which goals. Moreover, practitioners should never under-estimate the extent to which personal, petty and careerist motives may influences the most important diplomatic events. Greeley's careerist vendetta against Seward decisively influenced the outcome of the 1861 secession crisis, as we saw. In 1999, as I discussed in *Chapter 1*, one frustrated Russian military's bureaucrat professional grievance sufficed to bring NATO and Russia into their most dangerous confrontation in decades. Finally, as we saw in *Chapter 7*, career motives may have played a key role in how senior UN officials dealt with the Abkhaz-Georgian crises in early 2008. In short, careerist motives may sometimes be among the direct causes of war and peace.

The Secretary-General's second action would therefore be to compile a list of actors with the will to fight, those working for peace, and the influential ones in between. Next to their names, he would write their contact details, positions and, if known, character traits. He would also judge which actors were acting in good faith, and those who might not be.⁶¹ Ban Ki-moon would then seek to find those agents who may be responsible for the current crisis. In writing this list, he would

⁵⁸ As Ned Lebow concludes, "structural change may be the product, not the cause, of behaviour – the opposite of what most realist theories contend." *Ibid.* 616.

⁵⁹ See Lebow (2000: 616).

⁶⁰ A list of key international contacts was circulated among diplomatic and aid actors during the 2007-2008 Kenyan electoral crisis, for example.

⁶¹ As one practitioner noted: "people tend to study preventive diplomacy and mediation and so forth almost from an assumption that everyone wants the same thing in life... [But] sometimes some parties *do* want there to be violence." Interview with UN official in the Department of Political Affairs, 18 September 2012.

not fail to add the names of influential foreign ministers who may help, such as Indonesia's Marty Natalegawa, South Korean officials who may assist him, media representatives and even backchannel contacts close to Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe. He would also channel civil society organisations on each side, include think tanks, NGOs and women's groups lobbying for peace – as Kofi Annan did so skilfully in his 2008 Kenyan mediation. The Secretary-General, like a conductor, would attempt to synchronise diplomatic efforts.

3. Craft a Strategy, Expect it to Change

A critical step in Ban Ki-moon's efforts to prevent a Sino-Japanese war is to craft a game plan. Just as William Henry Seward put pen to paper in 1861, and Matthew Bryza did likewise in 2008, the Secretary-General and his staff will form a plan. By way of example, he may judge that the current crisis has least five critical decision points:

1. Shinzo Abe's decision in reaction to the Chinese protestors' incursion on the islands.
2. Xi Jinping's decision, in case Japan sends coast guard vessels or arrests protestors.
3. The U.S. president's decision regarding whether to support Japan militarily.
4. The shared decision of how to deal with the protestors.
5. The shared decision of how to resolve this dispute in the long-term.

This list could grow exponentially, based on the reactions of each actor to the last decision. For the sake of convenience, we therefore consider only these five critical decision points. Any strategy must begin from what Clausewitz called the *final decision*. In war, the final decision is to subdue an enemy's will to fight. Ban Ki-moon is pursuing the same goal, by diplomatic means. But that goal has human faces, and is specific to each context. As such, the UN Secretary-General may decide that the five main objectives of his strategy are to:

1. Convince Abe to wait 48 hours, while he negotiates with the Chinese leadership.
2. Extract a statement from Xi that these protestors do not represent Chinese policy.
3. Entreat the U.S. to avoid any strong public statements.
4. Coordinate an extraction of the protestors.
5. Propose future talks hosted by Indonesia on dispute resolution.

These are only the starting points of a diplomatic strategy. A real-life strategy, to be of any use, must be flexible enough to adapt to future events. There are two types of contingencies to worry about: the unpredictable actions of other agents and pure chance. Successive developments could render this plan moot. For example, if Abe ordered coast guard vessels to arrest Chinese protestors on the islands, Ban Ki-moon would be back to square one. A rigid strategy, too wedded to any key

point, is as fragile as glass. To survive the impact with reality, it must be elastic. A second factor which may undermine the above strategy consists of unpredictable elements of chance: an incoming storm which prompts or delays one actor's decision, a war in the Middle East, or a natural disaster in China. A military theorist's advice applies to Ban Ki-moon's own East China Sea peace plan:

as your knowledge improves, you will get a better idea both of what needs to be done and of your own limitations. Like any plan, this plan will change once you hit the ground, and may need to be scrapped if there is a major shift in the environment. But you still need a plan, and the process of planning will give you a simple robust idea of what to achieve, even if the methods change.⁶²

Ban Ki-moon ought sooner to violate his own plan than let this essentially static mental map give him a misleading, ossified view of reality. Reality will keep changing with the strategic interactions of the key actors, including his own.⁶³ A valid contingency plan can never be worked out in detail ahead of time, stored in a cupboard, and dusted off when necessary. The League of Nations operated under this mistaken assumption.⁶⁴ In an international crisis, the "enormous friction" is not concentrated at a few known points, as in mechanics, but is an immanent part of the crisis itself, its "chief origin being chance".⁶⁵ Ban Ki-moon ought to adapt to change, just as a field Commander adapts to the ever-changing conditions of war.

4. By Any Means Necessary

Ban Ki-moon now has the outline of a dynamic and flexible strategy. What his strategy will not tell him is exactly how to act. This is the realm of tactics – the lower-level moves in negotiations with the key actors.⁶⁶ It is impossible to catalogue an exhaustive list of possible tactics. A Persian general reportedly deployed cats in a fight against Egyptians, who held the animal sacred and therefore avoided killing them. (The Egyptians lost). Similarly, in his efforts to prevent civil war in 1861, William Henry Seward bribed contacts at the New York port to hire out vessels which Lincoln had intended to use to resupply Fort Sumter, a clear act of sedition. Yet war cats and sedition are not timeless tactics. Tactics of preventive diplomacy may range from a mere telephone conversation to deploying a fact-finding mission.⁶⁷ But they are ultimately limited solely by the imagination.

While Ban Ki-moon's tactical options are limitless, there are key tactical considerations: time, incentives, threats and partnerships. Time pressure is often the main sources of leverage of

⁶² Kilcullen (2010: 34).

⁶³ It might prove useful, in such a diplomatic mission, to task advisers or mediation support staff to keep a continuous record of the above strategy, in order to have a definitive record of how the crisis unfolded from the mediator's perspective – just as Commanders keep records of operational plans. This would allow future scholars and diplomatic missions to study how closely the plans of the mediators converged on reality, or how widely they diverged from it, with a view to drawing lessons learned.

⁶⁴ Carr (1962: 31).

⁶⁵ Clausewitz (1982: 165).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 173.

⁶⁷ Acharya (1999: 20).

mediators.⁶⁸ Ban Ki-moon may, for example, manufacture a deadline or increase the antagonists' perception of urgency to facilitate a peaceful compromise.⁶⁹ He may cultivate the parties' sense of a stalemate in a press conference or on the phone.⁷⁰ He could appeal to the risks of conflict, reputation, world opinion and the verdict of history.⁷¹ Incentives are another self-evident tactical consideration. Simply put, there must be some reward for parties to abandon the resort to the use of force.⁷² His leverage is evidently more limited in dealing with two great powers than with two warring factions in a civil war, but Ban Ki-moon may have non-material sources of leverage. Many relatively weak mediators have succeeded, such as the Vatican's role in mediating the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962,⁷³ and in preventing an escalation to war between Chile and Argentina in 1978.⁷⁴

More controversially, he may make use of tactical threats. While academics are divided on this question, carefully-designed threats may often be effective in preventing war.⁷⁵ "Diplomacy without force is like an orchestra without a score," as Frederick the Great said.⁷⁶ In Burundi, Ambassador Ould-Abdallah prevented a coup d'état by threatening "to expose unsavoury details of the personal lives of would-be troublemakers."⁷⁷ Ban Ki-moon would have limited coercive means to pressure Japan and China. However, if individuals in either government obstructed his diplomatic efforts, he could refer the dispute to the Security Council or to an international court. Alternatively, he may isolate specific peace spoilers by leaking their names to international media.⁷⁸

A fourth tactical consideration concerns Ban Ki-moon's relationship and coordination with other international actors, including diplomats, NGOs, the media, etc. Studies suggest that diplomatic missions led by a strong actor are more likely to succeed.⁷⁹ In theory, this sounds like a sensible recommendation. In practice, it is extremely difficult. Preventive diplomacy is a popular and crowded field. But the growing competition in this business may ultimately undermine the goal of preventing violent conflicts. As Ould-Abdallah concluded, "Preventive Diplomacy is virtually impossible when you have a multiplication of mediators."⁸⁰ This proliferation of diplomatic initiatives gives rise to "forum-shopping".⁸¹ A lead preventive actor like the UN Secretary-General should marshal other actors to support his preventive plan, just as Kofi Annan did effectively in

⁶⁸ Ould-Abdallah (2000: 134).

⁶⁹ See Zartman (2008a: 164).

⁷⁰ Zartman (2008b: 132-133).

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 169.

⁷² Hampson (2002: 146-147).

⁷³ Rychlak (2011).

⁷⁴ Laudy (2000: 293-320).

⁷⁵ Jentleson (2000: 13-14), Steiner (2004) and (1998), Lund (2001), and Zartman (2008b: 169).

⁷⁶ Cited in Pastor (1999: 508).

⁷⁷ Ould-Abdallah (2000: x).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Hampson (2002: 152), and Abdallah (2000:110-111).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 131.

⁸¹ Interview with UN official in the Department of Political Affairs, 18 September 2012.

Kenya. In 1954, for example, Dag Hammarskjöld cultivated a media blackout to help settle a dangerous U.S.-China crisis.⁸² Ultimately, the above is only a cursory oversight of possible tactical issues. Ban Ki-moon will need every ounce of tactical skill he can muster to attempt to sway the wills of his interlocutors.

5. Know Your Limits

The Delphic maxim “know thyself” should remind Ban Ki-moon of three limitations. The first is that even the Secretary-General of the UN has limited influence in this situation. He is but an actor in a broader international web, and not an island unto himself. His mission is mandated, empowered, or enfeebled by a bureaucracy of thousands, and by the great powers, at least three of which are involved in the present crisis. The UN defines the official scope of his mandate and freedom of manoeuvre. His mission would certainly benefit from a Napoleonic mandate which is “short and obscure”.⁸³ But that is not within his control. There is a less obvious limitation which many high-level diplomatic actors report.

In his mission, Ban Ki-moon would face immense psychological pressure, as well as prolonged sleep deprivation. In 1830, an elderly Talleyrand frequently worked to the point of exhaustion, negotiating until 4am or 5am – for close to a year – to prevent a European war over Belgium.⁸⁴ General Scott was sleepless during much of his mediation in 1838.⁸⁵ Sir Edward Grey, during the July 1914 crisis, was at wit’s end from his lack of sleep.⁸⁶ Dag Hammarskjöld worked 20 hour days for weeks at a time during crises.⁸⁷ In 1962, John F. Kennedy and his advisors barely slept for thirteen days during the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁸⁸ This is hardly trivial. Even short-term sleep deprivation has deleterious effects on one’s decision-making processes, cognition, flexible thinking and adaptability to new information – all of which the Secretary-General will need.⁸⁹

This is what Clausewitz meant by the weight of war gradually coming to rest on a Commander’s will. By the “spark of purpose, the light of hope, must be kindled afresh in others,” as he wrote.⁹⁰ To cope with stresses, one senior diplomat imbued his work with “a quasi-spiritual dimension” and lived “like a monk”.⁹¹ Dag Hammarskjöld famously found solace in the writings of the “great

⁸² Cordier and Foote (1969: 426).

⁸³ One UN mediator argued that such short and flexible mandates were more empowering for mediators. Interview with UN official in the Department of Political Affairs, 18 September 2012.

⁸⁴ Bernard (1973: 568).

⁸⁵ Scott (1864: 335).

⁸⁶ Clark (2014: 535).

⁸⁷ Hammarskjöld (2006: Viii).

⁸⁸ Mooney (2011).

⁸⁹ See, for example, Harrison and Horne (1999), Killgore, Balkin and Wesensten (2006), Killgore (2010).

⁹⁰ Clausewitz (1982: 145).

⁹¹ He explicitly stated: “I took a quasi-religious view of my mission, and it was necessary to be prepared to accept personal sacrifices.” Ould-Abdallah (2000: 146).

medieval mystics”.⁹² In the present crisis, Ban Ki-moon will be navigating blindly, sleep-walking from meetings to phone calls and back. He may even recall, in a quiet moment, what Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in his diary, *Markings*:

Sleepless questions
In the small hours:
Have I done right?
Why did I act
Just as I did?
Over and over again
The same steps,
The same words:
Never the answer.⁹³

A final limitation which Ban Ki-moon ought to remember is that his interlocutors are free agents. A committed leader who had made up his or her mind to resort to force may resist virtually all attempts at persuasion. In this context, Ban Ki-moon could truly do nothing to change their minds by force of arguments. However, he may find solace in two points. Firstly, for the most part, he most likely would not know *for sure* which decision-makers harboured war-like intentions. He should therefore persevere against all odds. Secondly, if he did identify which actors were committed to the use of force, Ban Ki-moon might not change their minds, but may perhaps be able to undermine their influence. For example, he could utilise the mediator’s last card: stepping down.⁹⁴ This is not generally advisable so long as he is not certain that one or more actors are committed to violence. But if he is certain, the threat of walking away from a peace effort may be the last source of Ban Ki-moon’s influence, which he could use to lay the blame at one or both sides for making war inevitable.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set out a five-stage planning process for preventive diplomacy, based on Clausewitz’s insights into military planning. This model represents the apex of the practical insights of this dissertation, reflecting a marriage of philosophical and empirical enquiry. However, this chapter revealed several limitations in the ambition of crafting a practical theory of preventive diplomacy. Firstly, this dissertation has not been honed by first-hand experience, although its author has consulted extensively with practitioners. I therefore conclude, as suggested earlier in this chapter, that an enduring practical theory of preventive diplomacy will lie dormant until the likes of a Ban Ki-moon takes it up. In the mean-time, future research might consist of interviewing practitioners to critique, complement and complete the above planning model into a more detailed one.

⁹² Hammarskjöld (2006: viii).

⁹³ *Ibid.* 9.

⁹⁴ According to UN official in the Department of Political Affairs, 18 September 2012.

Secondly, the above section may – in the name of brevity – have insufficiently explored a potential tension between the last and the present chapter: If agents are truly primary movers unmoved, how can diplomatic actors possibly seek to sway their wills? This question merits a more specialised treatment, which cannot take place in this dissertation. I suspect, however, that the sheer immovability of free agents is borne out by practitioners' experiences. This hypothesis, if correct, would explain the difficulty of persuading leaders to change their minds, *especially* when they have decided to go to war.⁹⁵ As such, future research might seek to complement the above theory – drawn chiefly from philosophy and history – with cutting-edge research on decision-making psychology.

A third crucial limitation is innate to the idea of a practical theory. As the above section suggests, a practical theory *cannot* offer generic advice in the form of timeless injunctions. A practical theory could only tell Ban Ki-moon what he *could* do, not what he *should*. Even then, all these options were intimately tied to the context of the Senkaku-Diaoyu crisis, to the actions of the disputants, and to Ban Ki-moon's role. The UN Secretary-General might be expected to play an entirely different role in mediating a coup d'état in the Central African Republic, rather than a great power stand-off between Japan and China. This partly speaks to the missing aspect of power relations, which future researchers may weave into the debate on preventive diplomacy. But this also reveals that Ban Ki-moon's own agency – or, more specifically, the influence he could bring to bear – was dependent on his own personality, agency and relation to the disputants.

This insight strengthens an argument I made in the *Introduction*: preventing war requires more than selecting the required diplomatic tool, and implementing it with bureaucratic efficiency. To advance a theoretically-informed and practical debate on preventive diplomacy, it is to human beings, not abstractions, which we must look. I set out how this point may inform future research in the conclusion to this dissertation.

⁹⁵ On this precise point, see Johnson and Tierney (2011).

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“[F]reedom of the mind...is indispensable
if it is to dominate events, not to
be overpowered by them.”
- Clausewitz¹

To avoid tedium, I will not summarise previous arguments. The threads into which this dissertation converged are well summed up by Clausewitz above. Rather than abusing the patience of readers any longer, I will explain what this means, exploring the implications of this dissertation for three audiences: scholars of preventive diplomacy and International Relations, diplomatic practitioners and my grandmother. To begin, we must return to the question with which this dissertation began:

How have individual agents attempted to prevent war historically, and to which extent did individuals causally determine the outbreak, or prevention, of war?

I see at least three implications of this dissertation’s arguments for future research. In the first instance, one implication is that there may be as many answers to the first part of this question as there were attempts to prevent war. I have only studied a score or so of such cases, some of which did not fit into this dissertation; there are thousands more. Preventive diplomacy is a difficult field to study empirically. However, trained and perhaps biased as I am by historical scholarship, my research into preventive diplomacy has led me to the view that there may be as many causes of war as there are wars.² In other words, I am sceptical of the value of searching for the general causes of war. I do not see War as a singular, universal phenomenon, but as a human activity whose character, causes and consequences depend upon its context, origins and the interactions of the agents fighting it. Each war, I think, may be *sui generis*, of its own kind.

This sceptical position arose from my rejection of causal determinism, and my emphasis on the causal role of agents and chance in war and peace. If, as I think is true, a shrieking owl, gout or a king’s mistress may make a decisive influence between war and peace, then I cannot accept that the structural causes of war can be *causes* in an ordinary sense. This conclusion – which I enter tepidly, rather than affirming confidently – raises important questions about the IR debate on the causes of war. There may be a case for paying more explicit attention to the problem of *ranking* the causes of war, as Waltz attempted to do, and which most historians engage in tacitly.³ A hypothesis to investigate further may be that what we call the ‘structural causes’ of war may well be its ‘structural conditions’. These may simply be the circumstances which make war *possible*, rather than *actual*.

¹ Clausewitz (1982: 366).

² Suganami raised this argument, as discussed in CHAPTER 1, but subsequently distanced himself from it.

³ Carr (1961: 89-90).

This suggestion grows out of the argument that, in the final analysis, only people can cause or prevent wars.

A critic may reject this conclusion. They would have to substantiate the idea that wars have sometimes arisen seemingly without the conscious choice of human beings. Alternatively, they might argue that the pressures certain individuals faced were so overwhelming as to overcome their ability to do otherwise, or to shrink their freedom of manoeuvre to 0 percent.⁴ If Aristotle is correct, there is always a remaining 1 percent (if not much more), which we call free will or consciousness. Where people can act, Aristotle said, they can also *not* act. Theoretically, critics would need to disprove that people always have at least two options left.

This opens up an important research question. If every agent is the cause of their own actions, and if the interactions of agents alone determine the occurrence of war or peace, then we would need to explain how such causal interactions occur. To use a crude metaphor, I have only argued that humans are the theoretical atoms of war and peace – its indivisible unit⁵ – without explaining precisely how they interact to bring it about. I will leave this task to future research. However, this leads to questions regarding the originality of my argument. Hans Morgenthau argued that ‘human nature’ was the fundamental cause of war,⁶ which Waltz rejected for being a mono-causal explanation. Human nature cannot be the cause of all wars because war and peace alternate while it remains constant. This raises the question of whether there is any difference in arguing that *humans*, rather than human nature, cause wars.

The difference is simple: humans are plural. Whereas human nature attempts to explain all wars in one singular concept, my argument tends towards the opposite extreme. We can take the Second World War as an example. Theoretically, the causes of the Allied victory, I argue, may have been as numerous as the soldiers fighting, the individuals working on the home front, and any others whose actions contributed to the war effort. Every human being whose causal power contributed, however minutely, to the war was a cause of its outcome. It is only because most of these individuals’ identities are forgotten that historians refer to broad collective concepts, such as ‘the Allies’ or ‘economic power’, as the causes of victory. The same logic can be applied to the individuals whose actions contribute to preventing war. All the case studies above focussed only on a handful of individuals not because they were the *only* agents who made a difference to war and peace, but because they were the identifiable ones. It is only to avoid pedantry that we do not count all the possible causes of war. This would turn narrative history into dry and boring chronologies. Such

⁴ If this response comes, I only hope it is more nuanced than Sir Edward Grey’s argument that his efforts to prevent war were doomed by “the deliberate, relentless strokes of Fate, determined on human misfortune, as they are represented in Greek tragedy.” Grey (1935a: 174).

⁵ The Greek term *atomos* meant ‘indivisible’. Of course, the metaphor is imperfect because 1) atoms have no conscience, so far as we know, and 2) they *are* divisible.

⁶ Morgenthau (1948: 4).

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chronologies would never be complete, since the historical record simply forgets most individuals who ever lived. Concepts are useful for the sake of simplification, and to avoid mind-boggling and futile calculations, rather than to lead us to assume that a single cause determines the actions of all human beings.

Next, with regards to the specific literature on preventive diplomacy, I began this dissertation compelled by Stedman's argument that agency was plainly missing from the debate. I hope to have contributed to addressing this missing element. I began by critiquing the two most popular metaphors in the literature: war as a disease, and war as a mechanical problem. This critique was intended to be constructive, by providing a third tentative metaphor: that of war as a contest of wills. This metaphor captures the elements of dynamism, agency, chance and unpredictability inherent in war. Metaphors may limit our imaginativeness in designing solutions to policy problems. The militaristic metaphor which I developed at length in the previous chapter may also have downfalls, such as unduly militarising the debate. However, I think this risk is justifiable. I conclude that theorists ought to shamelessly think like generals, if they wish to influence their actions. Generally, my hope is to have breathed new debates into the hopeful literature of preventive diplomacy which, after such a promising start in the 1990s, is now largely silent.

At a broader disciplinary level of International Relations scholarship, this dissertation has indirectly challenged some foundations of the field, especially the idea that states are purposive agents and the most important causal units of international life. This critique has been a collateral effect of my endeavour, rather than its primary purpose. As Wight brilliantly put it, for IR to question this is akin to Descartes questioning his existence.⁷ But I think this question needs to be asked not out of irreverence towards disciplinary mythology, but to avoid building elegant theories on the quicksand of unchallenged assumptions. By arguing for individualism, I tacitly rejected the assumption that states are agents at all. I hope for this commitment to methodological individualism to be received less as a gauntlet than a collaborative problem: namely, how the legal fiction of states being agents can be reconciled, if at all, with human agency. Every fibre of this dissertation has been woven around a strong and, at times, bald critique of the assumption that social structures can ever cause humans to do anything. This rejection, of course, had determinism in its sights, and a commitment to free will. Although I am far from advocating a 'metaphysical turn' in IR, I nevertheless think that IR may gain in richness by drawing on this millennia-old philosophical debate, which is an endless source of wonder, confusion but, arguably, insights of practical utility.

⁷ Wight (2006: 178).

Thirdly, the arguments in this dissertation have implications for diplomatic practitioners. In international institutions, such as NATO and the UN,⁸ academic concepts do sometimes pierce into the practitioners' realm, often lingering as slogans or rules of thumb. Indeed, the preventive diplomacy literature is notable for having featured such a promising exchange between practitioners and theorists. This cooperative model, however, has since stagnated. Working towards practical theories for this and other areas of international affairs, including aid and development programmes, may be a promising avenue of theorist-practitioner cooperation. At the very least, it may provide a common language for theorists to understand practitioners' concerns, and vice versa. I conclude this chapter not confident that I have proposed such a practical theory. At minimum, I hope to have cleared and cemented a philosophical foundation on which future scholars and practitioners may build this theory collaboratively.

To conclude, I reflect on what this would all mean for my ninety-two year old grandmother who lived through the Second World War, and remembers the steel din of German boots on the cobblestone streets of Paris. My grandmother, since her experience in the war, has read voraciously about the various individuals – from the obvious leaders to the less-obvious translators and bureaucrats – who made the Third Reich possible, and who enabled the Second World War to happen. Intuitively, without having pursued doctoral research or plunged into philosophy, she views individuals as ultimately responsible for the war which marked her entire life, and those of millions of other men and women. My grandmother's pre-theoretical views on war and peace are borne out by the facts. She, and many lay people uninitiated to the esoteric world of International Relations, understands what is so easy to lose from sight: that people make history. The crises of tomorrow will be managed by individuals. Those which end in war will be the result of interactions among individuals. The thousands or millions of civilians and soldiers whose lives will be affected, and subsequently forgotten, will be individuals. There is no more boring truth, I conclude, than that humans cause and prevent wars. It is therefore to individuals that we should look to prevent future wars.

This dissertation contributed to knowledge by enthroning human agency at the core of preventive diplomacy, where I argue it belongs. To summarise this entire dissertation in five words: *humans, not concepts, cause wars*. Humans upset all the laws, and all the expectations, of social science. They are the free, stubborn, unpredictable masters of their fates, the causes of war and peace. They are also the creators of innumerable intellectual theories downplaying, if not denying, this fact. Scholars of preventive diplomacy, I argue, should therefore study and understand human agency as introspectively as does the philosopher, but as pragmatically as does the practitioner. The previous

⁸ The author interned at both institutions during his doctoral candidate, from September 2011-February 2012 and September 2012-November 2012 respectively.

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two chapters, taken together, do not approximate the title of a theory in the grandest sense. Instead, the main ambition of this dissertation has been to craft the foundations for what I term a *practical theory* of preventive diplomacy. The aim of a practical theory is to remain as close to the ground of experience as possible, and to assist the judgment of practitioners, not to substitute it. I conclude that the way to prevent future wars lies not in designing perfect schemes for world peace, but in understanding our imperfect minds. This simple truth may help individuals attempting to prevent war.

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List of Interviewees*

Bryza, Matthew. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. 31 July 2014.

Cook, Margie. Team Leader, DAI Drivers of Accountability, Kenya Project Director. 29 October 2014.

Corell, Hans. Ambassador, Legal Advisor to Kofi Annan during 2008 mediation. 29 July 2014.

Elklit, Jørgen. Professor, Aarhus University, Department of Political Science and government. 12 September 2014.

Grist, Ryan. Former Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission in Georgia. 18 August 2014.

Hewitt, George. Professor, Honorary Consul of Abkhazia in Great Britain. 18 August 2014.

Kunin, Daniel. Former advisor to President Saakashvili. 23 October 2014.

Kriegler, Johann. Judge, Chairman of the Independent Review Commission (IREC). 15 September 2014.

Saghrajka, Neha. Liaison Officer of the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities, UNOPS. 28 October 2014.

Tagliavini, Heidi. Ambassador, Head of International Fact-Finding Mission in Georgia. 16 January 2012.

Yard, Michael. Chief of Party, Kenya and Election Technology Expert. 29 August 2014

* For this dissertation, I interviewed over 70 serving and former diplomats and policy-makers, including at NATO Headquarters and the United Nations in New York. Not each interview was woven into this thesis, and the majority of interviewees whom I cited selected varying degrees of anonymity. I have labelled “Unattributable Interview”, as other scholars have done, for those interviewees who requested a maximum of anonymity, for professional or ethical reasons. The above list reflects only those interviewees who agreed to be identified.